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THE HOUSE OF MEMORIES

By
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TO
MY SONS

*Que Dieu daigne vous donner à tous,
Mes bons amis,
Tout ce qu'il faut de patience
Pour supporter la vie,
D'amour et de bienveillance,
Pour la rendre douce et utile,
Et de gaieté
Pour s'en moquer.*

CHARLES NODIER.



PREFACE

THE conviction that a preface is seldom read rarely discourages the author from writing one. On the day I attempted to write mine I happened to drive across a characteristic bit of English country — ragged heathland silvered with rain and fringed with Scotch firs — to visit a neighboring country-house. As I waited at the park gates for the grey-haired lodge-keeper to open them, I realized that the reading of a preface should be executed as swiftly as the performance of this office. The expected guest should not be kept waiting.

Before I left — it was a first visit — I was shown the family pictures, a medley of good and bad, of old and new, each however possessing some close association with the house that sheltered it, and for that reason making an appeal to the imagination and the heart.

In the case of my little book, when the gates are opened there is no avenue of history that leads us to the Hall, it is a house of memories which I am about to enter. There are many pictures in it which look down at me with kindly eyes and welcoming gestures, and it has pleased my fancy to repaint some of them, not in a pigment which only the "inward eye" can see, but in words which will keep them closer to me.

Whilst I am thus engaged I have for a time re-peopled my silent house with the actual figures of my childhood, awakened in it the echoes of the laughter of my youth.

For the purpose of my fancy it should be a French house with a steep high-pitched roof and mansard windows. When I look through them I can see the long stretch of life's road that I have travelled since I first entered here.

My visit shall not last long — that would be in bad taste — just time for those who come with me to catch a fleeting glance at the inmates, and in that little space before the light dies, they shall make friends.

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THE HOUSE
OF MEMORIES

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The English, like ancient medals, kept more apart and passing but few people's hands, preserve the first sharpness which the fine hand of Nature has given them — they are not so pleasant to feel but in return the legend is so visible that at the first look you see whose image and superscription they bear. But the French, M. le Comte, said I . . . have so many excellencies they can the better spare this — they are a loyal, a gallant, a generous, an ingenious and good-tempered people as is under heaven — if they have a fault, they are too serious. Mon Dieu, cried the Count rising out of his chair.

STERNE'S *Sentimental Journey*.



I

REMEMBER a line in a French play where a lady turns playfully to a gentleman — they are watching the goldfish play in the fountain of a garden of tropical splendour — and asks, "*Aimez-vous les poissons rouges?*" The reply was, "*Mon Dieu, Madame, je ne les crains pas,*" an admission of fearlessness which raised a laugh. When you ask a Frenchman, however, if he is coming to England, the answer is not so recklessly courageous. In nine cases out of ten he will reply, "*Hélas, Madame, je crains la mer.*" Oh, defenders of Verdun, I wish we could administer to you some jumping powder that might transport you more often and immune from the qualms of sea-sickness to our shores.

How rarely we receive calls from our next-door neighbors, and what a number of unreturned visits they owe us, for it is almost as unexpected to meet a Frenchman in London as it is to meet a Chinaman.

The Frenchman frankly dislikes living outside his own country, in which he is the antithesis of the American, amiable but inveterate human cuckoo; therefore when we enjoy the rare treat of meeting a Frenchman we are all agog, and hope against hope that we shall be allowed to address him in his own language. We prepare ourselves to ask him a great many things which we consider carefully beforehand, and which have to be dovetailed into our restricted vocabulary. Like the young man at the dinner party given to the distinguished stranger by the Vencerings in *Our Mutual Friend*, these obstinate questionings are prefaced by "Fisker?" In my young days it was an exquisite pleasure to glean the harvest of one's French grammar, or of those months wasted in a pension at Neuilly on such occasions; latterly however, and notably since the war, the Frenchman is able to defend himself. Where and how he has learned English I know not, most probably at schools where the methods adopted are presumably not those that are in favor here. I was recently struck by the Lower Boys at Eton being given Loti's *Sur Mer* as a construe-book, containing as it does a vocabulary useful for any young gentle-

man destined to sail round the world before the mast, whilst some of the older Etonians were ploughing their way through Théophile Gautier's *Voyage en Espagne* with its highly technical architectural phraseology that would baffle any but an expert. In recent years, admittedly, the Frenchman has acquired our language, and with a dogged determination scratches along well enough in it to save himself the pain which we used to inflict upon him mercilessly, for his language to him is a very precious thing; it is an instrument at which he has chosen to become a *virtuose*. Its limitations have intensified his skill, and the old joke of how well a Frenchman talks French is not a joke at all, but a platitude. It is said of the seventeenth-century writer Malherbe that when he was dying he corrected his nurse for some grammatical error she made, and when reproved for doing so by his confessor, who exhorted him to dwell on more spiritual subjects of meditation, he asserted that he would spend his last breath in fighting for the purity of the language for which he had done so much.

At houses where foreigners are entertained — not unawares — a Frenchman will be struck by a

menagerie full of idiosyncrasies in English manners. Not least will he be surprised at the obvious difficulty which his hosts experience in the simple matter of introductions. The 'prentice hand (always a worse social evil than the cloven hoof) is all too apparent here. These duties are executed smoothly on the Continent, but in England this is where the machine of good manners creaks and often breaks down.

Abroad the stranger arrives, and he is led up to his fellow-guests one by one, who through some legerdemain on the part of the hostess have arranged themselves in an easy semicircle, not, as here, splintered off from the main body in over-intimate groups of twos and threes. He is made known to all in turn, both names are made audible, and if by an oversight a single introduction is omitted the newcomer corrects it himself by asking to be introduced. For a time I fondly labored under the delusion that the foreigner who asked his hostess to be introduced to me had been captivated by my charm; it was quite a blow to realize that it was nothing of the sort, but a rebuke to her for an omission that, had it been intentional, would have been a direct insult to him.

The French certainly score socially by an entire absence of self-consciousness. I am assuming that it is self-consciousness which makes us clumsy and graceless in the discharge of these elementary duties which are easy as breathing to them.

In cosmopolitan society we as a nation do not shine. Are Englishwomen conscious that they are worse dressed, and Englishmen that they are less educated? Are we burdened with an inferiority complex (threadbare phrase) or is it, on the contrary — and I prefer to think that this is so — a survival of our insular prejudice? The sentiment expressed by old Osborne in *Vanity Fair*, and one that with him we used to extend with good-natured impartiality to all foreigners, "I suppose no Briton's afraid of any damned Frenchman." If it is not a case for the psycho-analyst it certainly is one for the League of Nations.

I am inclined to believe that the explanation for this self-consciousness may lie in the fact that our national character is strangely lacking in simplicity, and that those ideas long treasured of the sincere Englishman and the artificial Frenchman should at once and for ever be reversed. One of the key-

qualities of French character is that of simplicity, of which greatness is largely composed.

And now for the stage which succeeds the introduction — observed or neglected as the case may be — conversation. An obstacle which we English people have raised for ourselves during the last century is the elimination of any form of polite address. What could be more baffling? It is curious that a nation should have allowed to drop out of its social convention a courtesy of primary importance. The young man who addresses an older one as "Sir" is branded as a soldier or a prig. The older one who addresses his contemporary in this manner must be dressed for the part (high blood-pressure and sponge-bag trousers). The woman who uses Madam to another is either a servant or a tradeswoman. The old to the young, the man to the woman, the married to the unmarried, each and all have, so to speak, to post their envelopes unaddressed. One would have thought that, consequently, we should take all the more pains to unveil the identity of our guests, and that introductions would have been indispensable; but no, we must go on playing a game of blind man's buff, and employ the bald "you"

which may boomerang to anyone within earshot, and which certainly does not deserve to secure what the shops call "personal attention." As to the constant repetition of the name of the person you are speaking to (if you are fortunate enough to know it), that is a habit to be deplored, and against which we warn the children. A German who spoke English well was goaded the other day into addressing me as "Lady," the only alternative he could find to *Gnädige Frau*. At the time I wondered idly when the Sir or Madam dropped out of general use with us: I am inclined to think that the art of polished conversation did not long survive it.

A Frenchman told me that it surprised him that the discussion of the weather *could* play the part it does in conversation here. Variations of climate present the same inexhaustible theme in all temperate zones, but I agree with him that it is only in England that we belabor the topic with such tireless enthusiasm. It is for us an opening, a gambit, a no man's land on which we can slide about impersonally.

The Frenchman does not understand conversation on these lines. A little aimless fencing with

foils and masks round a non-committal subject is not to his taste. With him the buttons are off the foils in the first bout. At dinner, before the fish comes round, he is quite capable of meeting your first remark with a firm "*Au contraire, Madame,*" which tears the envelope of the *ballon d'essai* of many a timid English talker, yet Maurois reassures us about this. In his charming little book of *Maximes*, he says "*Il y a un art de contredire qui est la plus adroite des flatteries.*"

All this time I have been following the fortunes or misfortunes of the Frenchman who comes to London and who finds himself in a social climate for which he will require an entirely new mental wardrobe, in which I would recommend him to include an aquascutum against the cold douche he may receive. No wonder he feels the nostalgia of his countryman who cried out "*Je ne guérirai jamais de mon pays.*"

I am minding his business; my own is to record the impressions the English consciousness receives when first arriving in Paris, and this is what I am certainly better qualified to do. Impressions which, however often repeated, never lose their freshness.



We like to say we are going to Paris; it is quite another wave-length to say we are going to Berlin or Rome. Paris sounds expensive and amusing, but the journey which pinions the Parisian's wing is a degrading adventure after all, and case-hardened though we may be, we suffer. The more practised the English traveller, the more he scorns to wear his livery. The Englishwoman will entrain for any destination from the Persian Gulf to the Outer Hebrides in a crêpe de chine dress with a string of pearls and an Asprey travelling cushion. The Frenchwoman, on the other hand, has clothes that definitely suggest a journey. You cannot doubt for an instant that she is *en voyage*. At the station she is a knight prepared to enter the lists. There is no chink in her armor. Her clothes and her appearance may be less or more pleasing, but to the Madame Bovary of to-day who is crossing the Channel, a bunch of violets and shoes of a particular liverish yellow kid are a necessity. She is companioned always, husband, lover, or son is at her side, staunch — solicitous. She gets through the crossing somehow, and she gets over it far more quickly than would seem possible when one remembers her an ab-

ject bundle of misery in a deck chair. The sea-change is ephemeral, at Calais some alchemy in her native air and she is once more charmingly *coiffée*, leaning her head against the white crochet antimacassars of the railway carriage. Its buff cushions make a becoming background — she closes her eyes languorously.

On arriving at the Gare du Nord one has the sensation of being utterly and entirely friendless. All previous stages of the journey, including the Customs, have been cosy corners compared to this Gehenna. Thoughts turn sadly to Victoria, visions of respectful inspectors, smart as naval officers, stale currant-buns, and obliging porters rise to mock us. Kind-hearted porters above all, as the garrulous pirates who boarded our vessel at Calais were friendly compared to the blue-bloused apaches of the terminus, who are at no pains to conceal that they want our money and our lives — thrown in. No tips seem too large to buy them off. The cobalt-blue *chasseur* of the hotel who eventually compounds with them is Perseus rescuing Andromeda.

My fellow-traveller, pretty Madame Bovary, has none of my misgivings. Her yellow shoes twinkle

jauntily past me, I see the swing of her skirt with the tail of my eye as she hurries through the barrier. In fifteen minutes' time she will be back in her apartment Boulevard Malesherbes, happy homing pigeon.

The first days in Paris are truly *dies irae*. The taste is bitter sweet when first it touches the lips. There is that hopeless feeling of one's own inadequacy which is a mortification in itself. Who is to lead us through the maze of these self-sufficing people to the desired objects?

To begin with, the traffic is in flood. Down the Champs Élysées the spate is carrying taxis along on its current at fifty miles an hour. How small the taxis are, and how large the Arc de Triomphe — all these new proportions are upsetting on first arrival. Down the Grands Boulevards, on the other hand the cars are immobilized, they stagnate in a solid block, pulsating, stinking, hooting — hooting for ever with shrill hysterical horns.

Paris seems exclusively occupied with Paris, and that again is discouraging. There is nothing smug about this self-engrossment of the French, they are not didactic like the Germans; they never suggest for a moment that we should think or do likewise —

they do not give us credit for being able to achieve either — they are content to be themselves. Thanks to this superb egotism the tidal wave of foreigners that beats upon their coast does not so much as erode one pebble of their foreshore. In spite of the Ritz-ians, that nomadic tribe which has invaded Paris and come to stay, France is safe for her posterity.

I have always felt Paris to be a country more than a town; the country of Paris distinct from the country of France. Its aspect is infinitely varied, it is made up of so many diverse landscapes. It is not one place but many. Never, as in London, a monotonous plain of masonry, where the points of the compass are the only guides, and the lonely wanderer might find himself bushed in a labyrinth of brick or stucco.

Then again I think of Paris as a huge library to explore. The streets are golden books that keep their sage counsel till we open them — books of varying size and splendor. The folios are the great avenues that lead one on for ever, made for the marching feet of the victorious armies of France; the small streets are the insignificant duo-decimos, tucked away on the top shelf. Then there are the noble volumes en-

riched with plates, books of history. The Place des Vosges, the Ile St. Louis, the Quais are the manuscripts, mediaeval, illuminated.

There are streets in Paris which are not streets at all, but little bits of the *province* that have strayed into the heart of the town, and are scared and bewildered at finding themselves here. They have silly little shops where you can buy nothing you want — village shops, drapers who keep a few kid gloves, all one size, a lace collar, and a woollen fichu or two. Yet this country cousin of a street may be rubbing shoulders with the sophisticated Boulevards. In these small streets one is, however, most conscious of the life of Paris. Some quest may have brought us here — the search for a framer, an antique shop, a small *lingère* or furrier — to one of these dark court-yards where one passes the *concierge* churning a little water and mud together with a broom outside his lodge. Inside it, in a penumbra redolent of *ragoût*, canaries flutter aimlessly in a cage and peck at a branch of millet. Ill-favored buildings on three sides of the court form the exterior of a hive of industry. There is no buzzing outside it, but inside each storey is a separate cell in the vast honey-

comb. For the bees that have visited the anthers of the flowers are busy distilling their nectar.

Open the door on any of these landings; you are invited to do so. "*Tournez le bouton s.v.p.*" and you will catch a glimpse of all those luxury trades which make half the riches of France. Workrooms full of concentrated midinettes bending with religious fervor over their work. Nimble fingers moving restlessly amongst embroideries, feathers, beads, all those things that are required for the ornament of woman who is primarily the true *article de Paris*.

My French maid told me that when she first came to England the phrase: "I shan't bother to do it better," struck her as being impossible to translate into the idiom of French ideas. Here in these gloomy insanitary houses, countless beings are bothering all the time, bothering to do whatever they do superlatively well.

A French decorator came over to London to do the gilding of the plaster work in a house my father was building. He was an old man of superlative charm and artistry, a nobleman of the eighteenth century disguised in an overall. He asked for rain-

water to use with his gold-leaf. Hard water, he said, did not yield the same results. He obtained it at trouble and expense, and was not content till he had done so. There is no obedience like the obedience of the French mind to an accepted standard of excellence, it is implicit.

Beauty for them is not achieved fortuitously, by an accident, a phenomenon, or a mood. The French will not hang their Aeolian harp in a grove for the gusts of genius to play upon. The purists in France have ever sought to imprison their lyre behind the restricting walls of form, and the David who plays for them is not the stark figure of inspiration, but is like the David of Donatello, whose hat is adorned with the flowers of the Renaissance.

After such reflections, home to dress. The sky is full of a painted glory, the Champs Elysées are bathed in light. The infinite lies in a blue haze beyond the Arc de Triomphe beckoning us to a Future that is as mutable as the Present, as changing as the Past.

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*Les souvenirs, ce sont des chambres sans serrures,
Des chambres vides où l'on n'ose plus entrer,
Parce que de vieux parents jadis y moururent,
On vit dans la maison où sont ces chambres closes,
On sait qu'elles sont là comme à leur habitude
Et c'est la chambre bleue, et c'est la chambre
rose . . .*

*La maison se remplit ainsi de solitude,
Et l'on y continue à vivre en souriant . . .*

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II

MY father was born in France, and France was his home, more or less, till 1870. He loved it, and when I had reached the age of reason, he arranged for me to know and love it too. I once asked an old French nun, "What is the age of reason?" but she only shook her head and replied, "Some never attain it." But that is by the way.

My parents went over to Paris to find an apartment, and succeeded in getting one in the unsympathetic quarter of the Etoile, said, however, to be the healthiest for young people, for whom in those days the Continent was held to be little less than a death-trap. Two floors in the rue Pauquet were hired in which to harbor the family. A footman, a housemaid, and our schoolroom maid, the silver and the linen, were all conveyed across the Channel and wafted through the Customs by a *laissez passer*, and a quantity of objects too, to embellish the sit-

ting-room, which contained a bleak compliment of rep sofas and chairs, ranged round the wall. My mother turned most of these out, tore down the curtains which matched them and succeeded in building an agreeable nest for her fledglings. Like a bird that embellishes hers with moss and feathers, she would return from the *antiquaires* with a piece of old brocade for the writing table, a clock for the mantel-piece, and finally a pair of white Oriental rabbits on Louis XV mounts, that she had found irresistible for their languorous and ingratiating airs, and which she had persuaded my grandfather to buy for her on his way through Paris to the South of France. Flame-colored silk curtains replaced the maroon rep, she cut out the pelmets herself, and hung them standing a little giddily on the top of the *concierge's* step-ladder.

The apartment was not modern --- no lift, and each time one reached the second floor, one hoped it was the third, because we had forgotten the *entresol*. Likewise no central heating, the cold of the winter months was intense. Only one bathroom, so the first purchase made was a supply of zinc baths. Not the luxurious sitz-bath, but the

backless variety which gives no sense of protection. When my mother discovered she had over-estimated the number needed, she requested the Bon Marché to take them back, and when they demurred, she drove them back herself through the fashionable streets of the Faubourg in an open cab, the baths balanced against her knee. As even her eloquence did not succeed in persuading the employees, she drove off leaving them lying forlornly on the pavement of the rue du Bac.

A cook was engaged — Marie Chèvre — a Swiss from the Jura. The English servants looked askance at a married woman content to leave her husband and child, but her little boy would come into the kitchen on Saturday afternoons, with the hood of his black schoolboy's cape drawn over his head on wet days. His bright eyes peeped out from under it, like those of a mouse in a mouse-trap. Monsieur Chèvre came too. He was an accountant at the emporium called the Belle Jardinière, a dignified, reserved man.

My mother and my aunt preceded us. They arrived as an advance guard and found Paris giving herself up whole-heartedly to a gala week in honor

of the visit of the Tsar and Tsarina -- the stone that laid the foundation of the Franco-Russian Entente. The streets garlanded, the river illuminated, processions by day, fireworks by night, a Review at Châlons, and a gala night at the Opera which my mother attended, and where she was struck by the absence of jewels.

The Tsarina drove through the streets, beautiful and unsmiling, and my mother described her then as an "unwept tear."

Arthur Meyer, editor of the *Gaulois*, invited my aunt to see the fireworks from his boat on the Seine. In the struggle to fight her way home through the packed crowds in the street that night, a fellow guest on the launch volunteered to reconduct her. He held some minor position on the staff of the newspaper, or he may only have been a casual contributor. Anyway, he piloted her safely to the rue Pauquet, and asked her permission to call the next day with a volume of his fugitive verse.

Edmond Lainé became from that day a regular visitor at the apartment. He was an intelligent bore with goggle eyes, and would sit on the edge of his chair with tightly gloved hands. We children hated

him, more especially as he composed monologues in doggerel which he expected us to recite.

Two governesses were part of our outfit — a South German, Fräulein Elise Lipp, and Anna Bigot, who was half French, half Italian. The two did not get on badly, but as far as mutual contempt went, honors were divided. Elise was square and sleek, Anna tall and touzled.

Elise Lipp could be very witty in a dry way, but she was also romantic and easily offended, and there again they ran neck to neck, and it was only my mother's cheerful tact that enabled life to run smoothly — at least on the surface.

Every evening when our lessons were done, Anna ran upstairs to the pantry to give lessons in French to the English servants. The footman was top of the class and became afterwards an excellent French scholar as he was taken on by my uncle, Reginald Lister.

Memories of the rue Pauquet are chapters on an educational experiment which, rightly perhaps, would not have obtained favor in these days. On our arrival my mother sought advice from her friends as to which classes we should attend. She

was recommended the Cours Knoertzer, rue du Colisée (it still exists), as the *pièce de résistance* of our intellectual banquet. Madame Knoertzer was a white-faced woman with frizzy black hair and dark eyes that snapped at you. Her erudition covered a wide field, and we ran up and down the gamut with her from geography to literature, and from Euclid to plain sewing. She enchanted my mother by her terse sayings, and the wealth of knowledge she displayed especially in the province of letters. The young ladies who attended the Cours with us had been her pupils many years, and were head and shoulders above us in every subject — molten by that white heat of learning which enables a girl in France to obtain her *baccalauréat*, or at least the Brevet Supérieur at the age of sixteen. They looked none the worse for this intensive treatment, and were gentle pig-tailed maidens with Christian names like hat-shops, and the high-sounding surnames of the Faubourg, for the Cours was frequented only by young persons of quality.

It took place once a week and lasted the whole afternoon, during which we covered the program of work set out the previous week. My natural in-

aptitude for mathematics, heightened by the difficulty I experienced in the French method of working them, soon obliged me to give up this subject — I was too far humiliated by it — but with the others I kept pace comfortably, and was only distressed when what Etonians call “the saying lesson” came round, and that was a very shy-making affair. Having a bad verbal memory, it was an agitating moment to stand up before the long table at which some twenty French girls were seated to recite the Alexandrines of Racine. I felt not unlike one of the young ladies of St. Cyr, under the tutelage of Madame de Maintenon. It was for them that *Esther* was written. When this unfortunate young person misquoted a line in Racine’s presence, he remonstrated with her for massacring his line (“*Ab! Mademoiselle, comme vous estropiez mes vers!*”), but as she burst into tears, the poet did the same, and then hastened to dry her eyes with his handkerchief. Some of the girls at the Cours Knoertzer declaimed well — diction is the birthright of their race. It was charming to hear them force a muted passion into selected passages from *Andromaque* or *Phèdre*. The *répétitrices* (coaches) sat on a row of chairs

against the walls, usually doing fine crochet work. When we halted on a line, or were unable to answer a question, a despairing glance from us met the angry eye of Fräulein Lipp or Mademoiselle Bigot, and we watched them slowly redden under the shame we were bringing on their defenceless heads. The arched finger holding the thread of cotton paused upraised in suspended animation, then if we could recover ourselves from the serious stumble, or if the line came back to us, it would resume its rhythmic shuttle-like movement, if not, the whole work, steel crochet-hook, ball of cotton, and despairing hands would fall dejectedly into the lap, and we, our incompetence fully established, would sink into our seats. Fräulein Lipp murmured "Shrecklich!" and Mademoiselle Bigot "Zut," and through the ranks of the other sheep-dogs, watching their respective charges, an imperceptible tremor of satisfaction would pass.

Amongst this band of girls there was one called Denise, who leavened the party by an advanced spirit that was less surprising when we heard she was the daughter of a rich manufacturer. He had more francs than his wife had scruples, and how this

wild pigeon had got into the cot of white fantails, I cannot tell. Perhaps Madame Knoertzer had sinned in ignorance, or perhaps she had been talked into it by Denise's mother, who was a masterful woman.

Denise was a great asset to the class. She was industrious, intelligent, without any shyness, and so good tempered that she made everybody else the same. In those days of marked fashions in clothes, when each year some new distorting shape was decreed, Denise's dress certainly struck a sharp individual note. Even our untutored eyes noticed something unusual in her appearance.

Her skirt was very full and short with many tucks round the hem, the sleeves had short puffs at the top of the arm, like a mediaeval page in an Italian fresco. She wore a lace or linen collar round an open neck, and a wide sash. Now, whatever the stuff or the season, Denise's dress followed these lines rigorously. Her hair hung in half ringlets round her shoulders, and on the top of her head a lock was twisted up which gave her a yellow crest, rather piquant and attractive.

When we got to know Denise well, she explained to us that she had worn this uniform for nine years.

Paquin had designed it for her when she was in the nursery, and it saved her mother time and thought to get the shape continually repeated. She shook out her skirts, and her ringlets danced as she called attention to the number of petticoats she wore, she added that her mother had always liked *les petites filles bien juponées*. Hence this charming silhouette, which turned her into a perfect Boutet de Monvel drawing. She is to be found on every page of his masterpiece, *La Civilité*.

Denise had however very set ideas upon clothes herself which impressed us. She said scarlet was the prettiest color for summer, and she wished to marry so as to be able to wear a yellow gown, a color it was difficult to wear on account of the sinister inference it carried — we wondered what and were never able to discover.

One day we went to tea with Denise in a rich apartment on one of the Avenues. It had a wide *galerie* hung with tapestries, one's feet sank into rich carpets, trophies of flowers gave a festive look, looped curtains and embroidered cushions darkened the windows. We invited Denise to play for us. She sat down at the piano without hesitation and

played a Chopin valse brilliantly, her ample sash falling over the piano stool, her blonde topknot marking the tempo. As she struck the last chord Madame B. appeared in the room, a grown-up Denise with the same coarse good looks, upright figure, and splendid teeth. I congratulated the performer but Madame declared that it was *saboté* (strummed), and sitting down herself played Liszt and Chopin to us for half an hour with an execution that was staggering. She got up, saying she was out of practice. Two or three men drifted into the room, they struck me as being on excellent terms with Denise, still better with her mother, who became a little ill at ease and retreated shortly afterwards to her boudoir with them, and we had the opulent drawing-room to ourselves. Denise embarked lightly on the subject of her marriage (she was fifteen) — a favorite topic.

That coyness on the subject which seals the lips of English parents and daughters is unknown in France. Marriage is reviewed by them in all its possible and impossible aspects. In a country where man or woman marries not only the partner of his or her choice, but is at pains to satisfy the wishes of his or her family in the matter, it results that

marriage is under discussion as any business proposition should be. The balance sheet of pros and cons is carefully audited, in consequence girls are logical and amenable, and young men do not, by rashly committing marriage, embark on a partnership in a firm which is obviously unsound. Parents are not separated in their affections and sympathies from their children where a marriage is arrived at through a happy consensus of opinion.

Madame de Girardin writes in 1844 of what the French call a *mariage d'inclination*, and what we term a "love-marriage," "*On ne s'aime pas toujours mais on se plaît toujours. Et si l'accord des passions est quelquefois passager, l'harmonie des goûts et des idées est éternelle.*" But neither love nor liking is long-lived where other factors are hopelessly unpromising.

The sprightly writer is delighted with the wedding and continues in her high-spirited vein, "*Oh, la superbe noce! La mariée était belle, sa mère était belle, son père était beau, ses sœurs étaient belles, son frère était beau, ses cousines étaient belles, ses oncles étaient beaux. Il est impossible d'avoir des parents plus avantageux. De beaux oncles, voilà qui est rare.*

Ordinairement les noces pèchent par les oncles, mais à ce mariage-là il y a eu des effets d'oncles merveilleux." Ornamental uncles, that is indeed a counsel of perfection!

The docility of the French girl's mind towards the wishes of her parents in the matter of her marriage must have its roots far back in the eighteenth century. The discipline that was exercised over her ancestresses at the convent of l'Abbaye au Bois or at St. Cyr, has survived in her. Two centuries have modified but not destroyed it. The *Histoire d'une grande dame au XVIII siècle, Princesse Hélène de Ligne*, gives us a fascinating picture of French girlhood in those days, and of the education that was preparing the daughters of the noble families of that epoch, not, as they thought, for the glittering court life that was awaiting them, but for a world that was to be riven by the horrors of the Revolution. Their light feet were destined not to tread the minuet but the steps that led them with unfaltering courage to the guillotine.

In this book compiled by Lucien Perey we read of the child-marriages that were then the order of the day, and were accepted with calm resignation

by the girls in the fashionable convents, who not infrequently had entered them at the age of three with their nurses, and who remained there for several years after they were married to complete their education. For at twelve years the young ladies were marriageable and often married. Their fiancés and husbands visited them in the convent parlor.

Mademoiselle de Bourbonne, barely twelve, made her first Communion and was married eight days later. Her melancholy was such that her comrades begged the permission of the Abbess to peep at her future husband as he arrived to claim her. The writer says that, truly, he was "abominable." The girls who had watched the ugly old man from the upstairs windows advised Mademoiselle de Bourbonne not to marry him. "*Je l'épouserai, car Papa le veut,*" she sighed with resignation.

The habits and customs of St. Cyr, described by Mademoiselle d'Aumale, give us much the same picture though it is an earlier one. Madame de Maintenon is determined that the young persons committed to her care should be frank and unself-conscious when the subject of their future marriages comes up for discussion. The prudish reticences

of the convent exasperate her, but when such discussion takes place she strikes a grave note; it must be explained to the girls that "*Quand elles auront passé par le mariage elles verront qu'il n'y a pas de quoi rire. Il faut les accoutumer à en parler sérieusement, car je crois que c'est l'état où l'on éprouve le plus de tribulations, même dans les meilleurs.*"

The Duchesse de Bourgogne,¹ married at the age of thirteen to the grandson of Louis XIV, was confided to the especial care of Madame de Maintenon. One day at St. Cyr she is told of the accession of Queen Anne, and interrupts a conversation the King is having on the prospects of peace that may result. The young duchess propounds a riddle which she herself is able to solve. "Aunt," she says to Madame de Maintenon, "why are the countries governed by queens more fortunate than those governed by kings?" She answered herself, "Because where there is a king the land is governed by women, and when there is a queen it is ruled by men."

Fathomless wisdom of the child-bride who sums up thus the epitome of feminism. Madame de Maintenon must have smiled — if a little wryly —

¹ Mary Adelaide of Savoy, daughter of the first King of Sardinia.

at this sally. Governess-Queen and Queen-Governess, her precepts for the young should be written in a golden book. Would that we could have stood beside the Lady Essex of that day who saw her ready to start for Marly with the King.

"Look at her well," said the friend who was with her watching the Royal progress.

Dressed in a damask the color of an autumn leaf, her only jewel a diamond cross, she placed herself at the side of the King in the carriage. As soon as she was seated, her tapestry and her spectacles were handed to her, and after smiling with sweetness and majesty, the royal coach starts on its journey, but before it passes out of view and before I close this chapter, let me recall the broad outline of Madame de Maintenon's counsels to the ladies who were responsible for the education of the pupils at St. Cyr.

She writes: "You must imbue each one of them with the love of her reputation. She must learn to possess the vanity that will defend it jealously. She must feel with regard to it a delicacy of which she might die but for which she must live." To the young woman who is standing on the threshold of life, no more sage precept could be offered.

Il existe une personne dont je connais tous les défauts, contre laquelle je suis sans cesse irritée, que je trouve vaine, légère, insociable, laquelle cependant est ma plus intime amie. Cette personne, c'est moi.

MADAME DU DEFFAND.



III

WE walked home from our *gouter* with Denise, discouraged by our friend's musical proficiency — that horrible proficiency of the French who are able to do everything well. Our own music master was named Henri Lütz. He was the worst possible teacher and most of the lesson he wasted in playing his own works to us. We sat in well feigned raptures, while his hands, soft and white like a boned chicken, ran through a *Berceuse* or an *Etude*. I used to encourage him all I could, so as to shorten the hour of my torment. One day he mentioned with an assumed nonchalance, whilst he stroked his Assyrian beard with two fingers and a thumb, that a symphony of his own composition was to be performed by the Lamoureux orchestra at a Sunday concert a fortnight later. More than ever did I now dread my music-lesson. That a composer of such recognized merit should have to listen whilst I mutilated a

Chopin *Nocturne* I was learning, was a form of Chinese torture to which I could not be a party.

Two days before the concert *Fräulein* Elise Lipp (the musical South-German) could talk of little else. Our master sent us complimentary tickets. We hurried down the Champs Elysées. Patient grey donkeys stood sunning themselves under the stripped chestnut trees. Goat carriages too were waiting for the children, and further on *Policbinelle* was playing his ageless drama to a few loiterers old and young.

On the booths that sell gingerbread and sweets, superb *nounous*, trailing their ribbon streamers, were buying paper windmills for their charges — pale-faced children in rich velvet coats. The *marchand de plaisir*, selling his wafers, was chanting his little song and twirling his rattle as he wandered up and down the sanded alleys, "*Mesdames, messieurs, voilà le plaisir.*" Where is it, pedlar of sweet biscuits? do you really know; in the red and white cylinder on your back? Yes, perhaps as much there as anywhere. You can truly buy pleasure for five sous on the Champs Elysées or ride straight there on a donkey or in a goat carriage. Later in life it becomes more difficult to find, and also more expensive.

On our arrival we searched the Concert Hall for our celebrity. We could scarcely endure the first part of the program. Berlioz, César Franck, Massenet were so much dead-sea fruit to us. The second half of the program began with the Symphony of Henri Lütz. We sat back in our stalls tense with emotion, Lamoureux raised his bâton.

The last note of the last movement died away on ether — a new sound arose, a sigh, a groan, a moan, a babel of inarticulate noises, and we realized that Henri Lütz was being hissed. We had recognized a certain restlessness on the part of the audience at the unwonted frequency of the use of the triangle, and an oft-repeated chime of bells playing an important part in the Allegro, but nothing to justify this outburst.

We made our way home sadly — but the difficulty was our next lesson. How were we to meet him that day? What allusions were we to make to this disastrous incident? He came. The ice was broken before he had laid down his hat and coat in the ante-room — a torrent of abuse of the musical critics poured from his lips. It had been a conspiracy, a treachery, a reprisal, the words *lâcheté*

and *trahison* took the place of the triangle and the bells in the confused orchestration of his hymn of hate.

We stood silently beside the cottage piano, it seemed so inadequate an instrument for so great a talent — our sympathy seemed equally out of scale. When the storm was hushed by my cousin's arpeggio, a tear stole down Fräulein Lipp's cheek. Anna Bigot had gone to fetch an egg-flip from the kitchen, it was placed by the elbow of the composer and — at first — ignored by him.

Henri Lütz disappeared from the ambit of the rue Pauquet soon afterwards. What happened to him I know not, but he took a vicarious revenge upon his persecutors by obliging us ever afterwards to play his dismal works.

So much for music, but none of the arts came amiss to us. Drawing was learned at Mademoiselle Valentino's studio. She was quite a character, and gathered about her in her studio off the Boulevard de Courcelles a number of young ladies who dabbled in water-color, or scratched in pastel. She was in easy circumstances and kept on this studio — full of talentless amateurs — for her own enjoyment



rather than from any financial necessity or for any hope of developing latent talent.

The girls who attended it were drawn from the same ranks as the students at the Cours Knoertzer. The model was decorously draped in recognition of their delicate susceptibilities and their tender years.

Mademoiselle Valentino, herself a competent artist, would make merry at the expense of her pupils, none of whom could draw. "*Regardez-moi dans ce profile vous me dessinez un bel œil de face,*" she would say, cracking her sides and pointing to a charcoal drawing where an Epstein effect was achieved by this anomaly. The studio was large and airy, laden with the fumes of fixatif, with which the girls sought to perpetuate the sketches it would have been kinder to blur into oblivion.

Eugénie, the servant, would announce the arrival of the maids come to fetch away the pupils. She would poke her head half way up the staircase and call out in a voice of thunder "*Ces demoiselles Barbara!*" She could never get hold of our surnames. When it was pointed out to her that my cousin was called Joan Duff she and the whole studio party were convulsed with laughter. "*Jaune d'œuf,*" they

would say, "*un drôle de nom*," which seen from that angle it certainly was.

I have a tender memory of two sisters who were my fellow students at Valentino's — the younger, Yvonne de Chevilly, was a graceful creature, with dark hair and moonlight eyes — her beauty was a pleasure to everyone in the studio. These two girls perished in the terrible fire of the *Bazar de la Charité*, where a cinematograph film broke into flames. Insufficient exits had been provided, and a great number of women were burned to death.

Yvonne possessed that strange loveliness which should strike a warning note. Maeterlinck has written an essay called "*Les Avertis*." In it he describes these souls that are loaned to us here for a moment only, who themselves have a prescience of their short sojourn. It is a secret whispered in their ear which tells them to spend their sweetness and their grace lavishly. Rare vessels, they are destined to overflow before we raise the cup to our parched lips. How is it that we allow one drop of their precious essence to be lost? "*Ils s'attardent un peu, nous regardent en souriant attentivement, semblent sur le point d'avouer qu'ils ont tout compris, et puis, vers*



la vingtième année, s'éloignent à la hâte, en étouffant leurs pas, comme s'ils venaient de découvrir qu'ils s'étaient trompés de demeure."

The poetaster Lainé had left his mark on my mother. When it was proposed by him that I should recite his verses, both he and she felt that lessons in diction were a vital part of my composite program. We found out that Got, the *doyen* of the Comédie Française, though he had recently retired, still gave private lessons, so to Got we repaired. The old man must have been eighty, but he had just married an exquisite young creature a little older than I was, who had been his pupil at the Conservatoire. I enjoyed these lessons immensely.

It was pure delight to hear him give the passage first — usually from one of the Repertory plays — and to listen to his phrasing, to watch the timing of word and gesture, to catch the cadence of the falling sentence, the building up word by word of a long tirade; to realize the immense technique that lay behind his effortless perfection.

Madame Got would often assist at the lesson, and perhaps read a part in whatever play we were working at. After these lessons the "saying lessons" at

the Cours held no more terrors for me — I had had my baptism of fire.

One more educational gambit which resulted in a stale mate. The seeds of Italian had fallen on rocky ground. Mademoiselle Bigot had neither skill nor zeal as an instructress, so Galignani's Library provided us with an indigent Neapolitan — Signor Cardini — who came three times a week to the apartment and attempted to impart his language. He was much out at elbow and looked as if he was holding starvation at bay with difficulty. Our tasks for him were always ill-prepared. He set us strings of irregular verbs to learn and we floundered helplessly through the elusive pronouns. He was incensed by my laziness, and on one occasion I offered him a brace of pheasants in place of an unprepared exercise. The pheasants were a kind present from some Rothschild château. His satisfaction was an eloquent testimony to his hunger. Whilst the shooting season lasted we were able to placate him with these fine fat cocks, but when January came round, and the gift pheasants ceased to make their welcome appearance, his righteous indignation with his pupil could no longer be parried, and one eve-



ning when as usual the home-work was nil, he rose in his wrath, and throwing Hugo's grammar across the table at me, seized his shabby Homburg, and left the room never to return.

The only thing he taught me was some lines about a *rondinella* (swallow) — I can say them now. He reminded me not a little of a belated swallow himself, whose strength was not sufficient to carry it back to the land of sunshine whence it came, and which one might find starved, rusty, and frozen on a corner of masonry some fine early winter morning. The Hugo grammar is with me still, I saw it the other day, and on the outside of the book one of us had written his name, after this incident, with three exclamation marks after it — Cardini!!!

After so much intellectual output, bed time on the top floor at the rue Pauquet was welcome. Agnes Berry presided over it, and charged us straightly to lie in the middle of the Empire beds with rounded ends lest the cold should "strike upwards."

Cold enough it was when the white mists of November had turned into December frosts. The windows were patterned over with white ferns; when we woke in the mornings one could not see the shops

opposite. There was a great quiet in the air. The street vendors' voices were still, with the winter days the goats had ceased to patter through the town on their silly Chippendale feet. They had disappeared as had the vast *potirons* (pumpkins) which had fascinated us when we first arrived in Paris, for we imagined them harnessed to a team of thoroughbred mice in Cinderella's fairy coach.

Agnes read a chapter of the Bible, then she left us hurriedly to join Mademoiselle Bigot's French class for the servants.

We heard the murmur of their voices and laughter through the wall. Sometimes we surreptitiously struck a match — the smell of sulphur quickened the consciousness of guilt — so as to read a page or two of *Esmond* before we went to sleep, but more often we fell asleep whilst talking, which is the pleasantest way to ferry across into the land of dreams.

J'aime les noms propres aussi. Je ne puis lire que des faits écrits par ceux à qui ils sont arrivés, ou qui en ont été témoins; je veux encore qu'ils soient racontés sans phrase, sans recherche, sans réflexions; que l'auteur ne soit point occupé de bien dire; enfin je veux le ton de la conversation. . . .

Letter of MADAME DU DEFFAND
to HORACE WALPOLE

came and went, and bored Monsieur Bocher by their deafness and their age, for he never grew old. He had the unquenchable fire of youth coursing through his veins. Flirtatious, mocking, tender, critical, ageless and limitless in his capacity for friendship.

The interior of the house was sombre and awe-inspiring. The ante-chamber stimulated expectation by its lofty proportions and echoing emptiness. When the servant threw open the door of the study Monsieur Bocher was usually at his ample writing-table, quill pen in hand, inditing on his black-edged paper one of those little notes at which he excelled. Each one he wrote in his cramped handwriting was salted with wit and sprinkled with sand, for he never used blotting-paper. A disastrous habit where he wrote a *petit bleu*, for it required a conjuror to open the coagulated edges.

How can I describe him? Small and pale, insignificant in figure, with a grim expression of the tightly closed lips, a thick crop of smoke-grey hair on his erect head, and eyes deep set and sparkling, *malicieux*, but never malicious.

As soon as one entered, the circle was made round the wood fire. That magic circle of chairs which in



France seems instantaneously to switch on the current of conversation, and in a moment the grave room was filled with laughter. He would begin in that most excellent way "*Allons, racontez-moi,*" and on the ragged string of our narrative what gay tunes he used to play!

All round the room were Empire bookcases full of rare books. The buying of fine books was Monsieur Bocher's only extravagance. He spent many happy hours at Porquet's shop, Quai Voltaire. Porquet is no more, his shop has disappeared, but he was a great personality of his day. The Comtesse de Béhague tells me her father, when collecting his library, visited or wrote to him every day of his life. Porquet loved to sell to Monsieur Bocher the beautiful bindings by the two brothers Padeloup, Le Gascon and Derôme.

Every day — the words seem to convey in English an intolerable charge, which *tous les jours* does not imply. The French have a talent for these daily habits. A repeating arabesque of intention and fulfilment. Monsieur Bocher had a *tous les jours* habit. It consisted in his daily letter to his son Emmanuel, to which a reply was written immediately, to be

followed later in the day by a visit from son to father.

Emmanuel Bocher was a man whose mental vivacity and impatience were terrific. France is the only country that could have sired him. His method in argument was that of the wolf in La Fontaine's fable "*Le loup et l'agneau*," but it would have taken a super-lamb to attempt to defend his cause with Emmanuel. That was why his father nicknamed him "*le violent*."

In the rue St. Dominique (we are still on the Rive Gauche), in a modest apartment containing very few small rooms and very many small children, lived the pretty widow whom "*le violent*" loved. I imagine she could tame him, but I think often at the cost of tears. He loved her classically, academically, as the Frenchman can love.

Madame X, faultlessly pretty, correct, limited, had distinction in spite of her conventional setting. Every corner of her apartment was densely inhabited. In the dining-room an Abbé sat over the dining-room table of an afternoon with the two elder sons, boys of sixteen, who, like all French youths, gave one a strong impression of sex. And

in the linen-room, a gentle nun, cool and shadowy from the sharp contrast of her black and white, was bending over the needlework in which she was instructing the two elder girls.

The room Madame X used was dingily red, and I seem to remember a great deal of fringed and buttoned upholstery. What I shall not forget was the beautiful flower-drawing by Madeleine Lemaire which stood on a table by the armchair, and next the drawing a vase of the same flowers as the water-color represented. In summer these flowers were fresh each day, and in winter they were replaced by artificial ones admirably reproduced by Camille Marchais.

The flowers were mignonette, a dark red rose, and some sprigs of gilliflower. There was an indescribable sentiment in this dual flower symbol — the drawing and the posy.

Who replenished the flowers as they faded? Was it "*le violent*"? Did their visible forms recall to him the day he had first met her? Were they growing in the garden or had she worn them in her dress? That deathless rose, whose fragrance was their love. Perhaps he had bought the flowers for her in the

Flower Market of the Madeleine, or they had stopped on the Boulevard and bought them together in a grand shop, and the florist had pinned the nosegay to her breast with admiration in his eyes; "*Fleurissez-vous, Madame,*" he said, but did she need a flower, flower that she was herself?

These days are long ago, "*le violent*" and Madame X are dead, but I never see a dark red rose without thinking of the apartment in the rue St. Dominique.

But to return to Monsieur Bocher and 59 rue de Varenne. He entertained rarely. I never knew whether this was due to the ineradicable inhospitality of the French, or because his household did not permit of it, but we dined with him very occasionally on a small table drawn close to the fire. An exquisitely laid table which seemed to spring out of the solid ground, like the table in the German fairy tale where the words "*Tischchen, deck dich*" produced a similar result.

The menu was discussed exhaustively for several days before it materialized. The host laid down a good many gastronomical canons such as, oysters must always be followed by *white* soup; frying, like

poetry, is an inspiration, its secret cannot be acquired. The dessert was chosen with extreme care. Gargantuan pears — *Passe Créssane* was their family name, — golden Chasselas grapes, and *Pommes d'Api* (midget apples, which made the pears seem all the larger) with scarlet cheeks, decorative but tasteless. The leaping firelight washed fruit and napery and the soft grey silver which we never see in England with its rosy light. Monsieur Bocher was happy and chuckling.

Sometimes we dined at Voisin's. On these occasions there were something sacramental about the meal. The restaurant was fairly empty, perhaps we dined at an unfashionable hour. The head waiter performed his ritual with unction. I sat uneasily on the plush *banquette* feeling that sooner or later I should prove my own unworthiness. It generally happened sooner, by my refusing to drink *Château Yquem*, or declining a second helping of *Omelette au Rhum*. Not a good evening. A better one far was when the Orleanist princes gave Monsieur Bocher their box at the *Théâtre Français*, and we were invited to accompany him. It was a *baignoire* in which we squatted (one cannot be said to sit in a

baignoire). A box of *Boules de Gomme* was provided by Boissier — a sweet of which Monsieur Bocher held the monopoly. I have not seen them since his death. Between the acts we visited the Foyer, and I was introduced to the splendid busts of Molière and Rotrou by Caffieri.

Molière whose magnanimous countenance seems to embrace the cosmos in a glance; and from the sprightly Rotrou we passed to the statue of Voltaire, by Houdon, tense and toothless, gripping his armchair with the fleshless hands of old age; surely one of the most remarkable statues of all time. Those evenings were unalloyed enjoyment and we owed them to the Orleanist princes. Poor gentlemen, they seemed always to be out of place. Madame de Liéven, the wife of the Russian Ambassador in London, writing of their family, said: "*Ces princes ne sont jamais que là où ils ne devraient pas être.*" Anyway we were glad they were not in their *baignoire* on those evenings at the Comédie Française!

On one occasion Monsieur Bocher took us all to lunch at Chantilly with the Duc d'Aumale. "*Toute la smala,*" as he was fond of describing these tribal

expeditions. It was a November day. The forest was shaking down its confetti of golden leaves. We assembled in the long gallery and awaited the august presence of our host. He entered in grand style, flanked by two subservient attendants, secretaries or aides-de-camp, I know not what. He had a fine person, and underlined forcibly his alleged likeness to the Grand Condé, from whose family he had inherited the château, by the loftiness of his demeanor. He spoke very loud, which shook my nerve, and Monsieur Bocher completed my discomfiture by saying several times "*Taisez-vous, Monseigneur, Mademoiselle Barbara vous fait dire que vous parlez trop.*" Those were my sentiments no doubt, but scarcely the time or the place at which I chose to have them expressed. Luckily Monseigneur was very deaf. I sat between a General whose name I have forgotten and a handsome young Roman — Prince Fabrizio Massimo. Last year I had tea with him in the Palazzo Massimo, the stately palace on the Corso Vittor Emmanuele where St. Philip Neri had brought a member of the Massimo family back from death to life. The anniversary is celebrated yearly by a stream of pilgrims.

Thirty years had elapsed since our chance meeting at Chantilly, but I was sorry the good saint could not have performed some miracle for us. After luncheon we made a tour of the apartments, and were shown the pictures by the Duke himself. He would dwell before the military pictures which recorded his campaigns and describe the strategic merits of each engagement.

I liked best the Decamps, the artist whose brush is an incantation that calls up the tragic desolation of the East, and Fromentin (author of *Dominique*, all too little read), who in a lesser degree creates a mirage of the desert.

Monsieur Bocher was a frequent visitor at our apartment rue Pauquet. Even the long climb up the staircase that led to it could not deter him. He would arrive so much out of breath that for the first few minutes he could only chuckle and exchange significant little winks and blinks with us. Then he would sink on to the big Chesterfield sofa we had brought out from England with us, and which in its chintz cover struck a happy country-house note in our little French interior. On one occasion we made him laugh so immoderately that he

slid off its slippery surface and sat down on the floor. This sofa spent the summer holidays *en pension* at Monsieur Bocher's. He liked to have it there as a hostage for our return, and it pleased my mother to think of his frail body resting on it; his mind only rested in sleep.

I feel regret now that so many of the hours we spent with him — he came almost daily — sped away in jokes and nonsense, at which he was past-master. It was difficult ever to find him in a grave mood, to induce him to detach his eyes from the sunny foreground of our youth, which warmed his aged limbs and refreshed his vision, to the far-away days of his past. And then again I regret that we did not make more excursions with him into the literary country that he knew so well. We were wandering in it ourselves somewhat forlornly, for we were young and our eyes could not measure the giant trees of the forest of French writers, nor could we track our way through its immensity. But when at rare moments some talk about our lessons at the Cours brought up the subject of letters, he would lead us into it and teach us to listen to the forest murmurs, the sighing of the wind in the branches,

and would help us pick the flowers that he discovered for us. The delicacy of his taste in these matters was an education. He had none of the conventional enthusiasms in which the French are wont to indulge, his literary selection was fastidious but unerring.

Of all the outings to which dear Monsieur Bocher treated us, however, an expedition to the house of his sister-in-law, Madame Odier, was the one that I look back to with most gratitude. To reach the rue Raynouard was, judging by the preparations, a service of danger. The journey was much discussed, and a *voiture du cercle* was ordered the day before to convey us to Passy. We were packed in it tight as sardines, Monsieur Bocher in top hat and dark blue overcoat had come to fetch us, and together we rolled slowly and noisily over the cobbled streets and up the hill. Our arrival was awaited and heralded by Emile, and Madame Odier's maid, with the appearance and manners of the Faubourg, stood in the hall to disrobe us. The house had a long low façade on the street, and above the *entresol* was a spiral stone staircase, such as one might find in a Scottish house. Madame Odier did not appear till

we were all assembled in the drawing-room. Then she entered with a rush of soft greetings like the cooing of a dove that is fluttering its wings earthwards. Wrapped in a soft white shawl which only gave one glimpses of the elegant silk and velvet of her dress. Her head was covered by a lace cap, its lappets framed her face. Her hair deserves a description; it was as dark and burnished when I first saw her in 1896 as when she was a girl. She was *coiffée* in an unforgettable way. The two lowest strands were taken from the centre parting and the hair drawn straight back from the brow to the crown of her head, the rest fell in glossy *bandeaux* over her ears; her forehead would have been too low, she said, to wear it any other way.

Her two sisters, Madame Bocher and Madame Delessert, were dowered with this same beautiful hair. Madame Odier would proudly boast that when her sisters walked in the garden with their hair undone, it swept the leaves along the lawn, and once when I was in the rue de Varenne Monsieur Bocher, from a little box on the huge writing table, drew out a finely plaited tress of his wife's hair; he held it to my head and it reached to my feet.

I have alas! no vivid recollection of the *salon* of the rue Raynouard — just a vague impression of its color, green and bronze like the right side and the wrong side of a magnolia leaf. Seated in her deep chair the dear lady began to entertain us. Her animation was great, her hands had quick explanatory gestures that helped to tell her story. At her elbow on a small table lay her paint box, the book she happened to be reading, her missal, and her gloves, these she nearly always wore in the house. Under a little glass dome stood a figure of the Holy Virgin hung with jewels — rings and a chain of diamonds, bracelets and other things, one did not look too closely.

Now Monsieur Bocher became the showman, and the first thing he led one to was the *glace sans tain* in which both she and he took a childish delight. This was nothing more nor less than a clear plate of glass, so let into the wall and shaped as to give one the impression of its being a picture hanging on the wall, frame and all. Through it one saw, as a landscape, the view from the terrace of the garden: the Paris sky and distant Champs de Mars, the towers of the Trocadero, the roofs and churches, and on a nearer plane a rounded mass of shrubs and trees

bloomed over by the light of late afternoon. Yes indeed, it was getting late, Madame Odier said so. *Gôûter* was served for us and we went down a few steps into the dining-room. On the centre of the table Emile had enthroned a compressed bunch of flowers from the garden. The flowers had that etiolated beauty of autumn flowers, monthly roses that can scarcely hold their petals and their sweetness, foolhardy chrysanthemums defying the frosts, and pale asters. A golden *brioche* neatly dissected and embedded on a napkin was handed round, and with it apricot jam. The apricot jam was another feature of the tea party. It was made yearly from a magnificent apricot tree on the terrace, a tree that never failed to fruit, and was visited by us whenever we came to the rue Raynouard. Madame Odier would walk us up to it, past the trellis of wistaria; I do not think she often went much farther. There was a cloistered serenity in her plot of ground such as one finds in a convent garden. Contentment flourished here, and like the apricot tree brought forth its golden fruit.

After the garden we came back to the drawing-room, and the big quarto volumes, bound in red

morocco, would be taken out of their bookcase and opened. They contained her drawings. Her water-colors were flawless in composition and technique. She was an illustrator of genius. One volume contained her illustrations of the *Inferno*, another was a life of St. Francis of Assisi. She had done two Shakespeare plays, *Hamlet* and the *Merchant of Venice*, and other books were diaries of her travels with landscapes, figures, architecture, and copies of the pictures in the museums of the towns she had visited.

Ary Sheffer had been drawing-master to the talented Mesdemoiselles de Laborde before they married, and once Madame Odier told us whilst he was ill or absent that Ingres himself had taught them. Dry "Papa Ingres" who said "*Le dessin est la probité de l'art*," but in spite of all that we are told he could not paint a woman with bare arms without leaving his canvas to kiss them. I do not know how he got on with his beautiful young pupils, but he must have been sorely tempted. A drawing of Madame Odier by Ingres hung in the drawing-room. Her face seemed as beautiful when I knew her, though she was more than eighty years of age, as when the

pure pencil of the master had traced her lovely adolescence. The same mild eyes, the lids like a Luini veiling a smile, the short straight nose and the full moulding of chin and mouth.

In other of her books she would sketch her great-nephews and nieces — the children of Madame de la Rochette. Their continuous animation when posing for her never baffled her patience. She would recall the little sayings of this daisy-chain of children — I think there were twelve of them — and their *jolis mouvements d'enfant* were faithfully recorded. Monsieur Bocher's housekeeper, Lucie, a personage rustling with respectability and black taffetas, who occasionally entertained us in the rue de Varenne *antichambre*, whilst he was trying to evict an importunate prince, told us that a great part of her life was spent on shopping expeditions for this nursery party, so Lucie was a well-known figure at the Bon Marché, where she went by the name of Madame Rendre. For, owing to the number of misfits that had to be sent back, her well-known opening "*Monsieur, je viens rendre,*" prefacing the return of fleets of little shoes and cargoes of pinafores, had become a standing joke.

How difficult it was to tear oneself away from the embowering atmosphere of tranquillity of this drawing-room — to close the red morocco folios, to embrace the hostess' soft cheek, while the thought of our departure caused more fluttering of her hands as she wrapped one's cloak close against the perils of the night, and the *voiture du cercle*. The *brioche* — what was left of it — was packed in many white papers and white string, and was to accompany us on our return journey. Emile in cotton gloves fumbled us into the carriage, and the other servants grouped behind him made us a *beau départ* on the doorstep. On both sides there were many cries of "*Au revoir!*"

At the time I was writing these pages about Madame Odier, I happened to be reading the *Life of Lady Georgiana Fullerton*, and in the notes and letters that record the years of her girlhood spent in Paris whilst her father Lord Granville was Ambassador there, I found various allusions to the dear hostess of the rue Raynouard. Lady Georgiana mentions her first as Mathilde de Laborde, one of the most charming people of the circle surrounding the

King at Fontainebleau, and again her graceful shadow flits across the pages after her marriage. There are theatricals mentioned in which Mr. Caradoc takes part with the other "gentlemen of the Embassy." He was the life-long friend of my dear friend Madame Odier, and afterwards became Lord Howden.

Monsieur Delessert, brother-in-law of Madame Odier and Prefect of Police in Paris during the troublous times of 1848, is also named. And so by the merest hazard, as my eyes were dwelling with tender admiration on the evening of her life, a door opened at random reveals her to me in the flush of her youth, with roses in her hair perhaps; her young shoulders on which life so far had imposed no burdens, rising from the billowing freshness of her ball-gown. I can fancy the young Caradoc, one of a host of admirers gathered round her. After his death he left his villa near Bayonne to her — Casa Caradoc — which legacy she immediately transferred to her nephew, Emmanuel Bocher.

I read these allusions, detached and bare as they are, with infinite pleasure. It is as if a flower, dried

in a book, had regained its color and its fragrance.

After Monsieur Bocher died Paris was changed for us. He belonged to France. He had the ready emotion, the deep comprehension, the sagacity that appears intuitive, but is actually metal tempered by centuries of cultured thought. The rue de Varenne was a little shrine to us, where we found age disguised by youth, wisdom by wit, experience by sympathy.

St. Bernard de Clairvaux wrote: "It is not a land of forgetfulness which the soul inhabits — the breadth of Heaven dilateth, not narroweth, hearts."

Some time ago I made a pilgrimage of devotion to the rue Raynouard. It took a very short while to reach Passy in a taxi, and the street no longer seemed steep. Number seven was still there but it is overshadowed by a sky-scraper, argus-eyed, with tier upon tier of windows, that partly covers and entirely overlooks the gracious garden, the garden of the apricot tree.

There are few people left now in Paris who remember Madame Odier, or her sister, Madame Delessert, to whose *salon* three times a week, came Prosper Mérimée, Alfred de Musset, and Eugène

Delacroix. Monsieur Bocher's house has disappeared.

Henceforth they must live in my heart where love has built for them habitations which neither Time nor Circumstance can destroy.

Tere de France, mult estes dulz paīs.

CHANSON DE ROLAND.



V

THE book shop of Emile Paul is in the Place Beauvau. A welcome break in the unending alignment of shops of the Faubourg St. Honoré is made by this cheerful little Place. Almost opposite is the Elysée; its depressingly bourgeois appearance makes one forget the interesting historical associations of its past, for behind those gates, now guarded by the Garde Républicaine like toy soldiers in their sentry boxes, lived Napoleon whilst he was Premier Consul.

This is mere digression, let us return to the shop, which is calm and friendly, and at the end of a busy morning makes a pleasant halting-place. It was at Emile Paul's that I first saw the Comtesse de C. and her daughter. They filled the shop with their vivid personality, and it was impossible to look at books, or listen to the prosy remarks of the shop-assistant, whilst they were there. The Comtesse was advising

her girl what books to choose for her New Year's presents. They seemed on excellent terms — like two happy sisters.

Mademoiselle de C. was seventeen, and in accordance with the French traditions of that time she was made to look as plain as God allowed her to be. Her hat was an inverted saucepan of hard felt, her dress was an uncompromising tailor-made, obviously ordered at "Old England," the shop where in those days callow youth was catered for, she wore button boots *pour le footing* that appeared to have no relation to the shape of her foot, and whose long toes suggested the profile of the duck-billed platypus. Her pretty face, pink and white, with dazzling teeth and smile, mocked at these efforts to obscure its charms, and flaunted them all the more.

The mother was small, trenchant, and impeccably neat. She bullied everyone in the shop (where one saw that she was well-known and loved) in a husky hectoring voice, and then ended by making them laugh and by laughing herself. When they left the shop I thought the sun had gone in.

The next day my uncle, First Secretary at the Embassy, took me to lunch with them. Somehow

I knew that day at Emile Paul's shop that they were going to be in my life. It had been an effort not to speak to them then, though I had not the faintest notion who they were.

The Comtesse de C. lived at that time in a small *hôtel* in the rue de Miromesnil. The courtyard was so small indeed that the carriage could barely turn inside it — and the garden at the back was not much larger than a pocket-handkerchief. In summer this garden seemed a grotto of rank green vegetation, which rarely saw the light, but in the early spring a lanky lilac tree leaned its flowering branches against the windows of the *salon*, as if it wanted to hear all that was being said inside — and well it might! The house was dark with the comfortless gloom that is entirely opposed to English ideas. The furniture looked as if it must have grown inside the house, it could scarcely have been chosen, bought, and brought into it, it was so entirely without character.

My first experience of the family circle alarmed and excited me at the same time. We were received with kindness — there was no party — but one had the impression of being hustled in the talk that began as soon as we got round the dining-room table. Not

in a discourteous manner, but in a way that made one feel little time in conversation here was to be wasted on glimpses of the obvious.

The Comte de C. arrived a trifle late for his guests. He was a tall, bald man, with a pink hatchet face and a bristle of white hair at the temples. His manner was so breezy that when he came into the room I expected instinctively all the doors and windows to begin to rattle.

The menu was a simple one, an omelette, a *châteaubriant*, and a compote of apples — something of that sort — but as is inevitable in France, it was commented on by somebody, and then discussed, dish for dish, by everybody.

After luncheon we went back into the dark drawing-room, and there was a pleasant feeling that the entertainment was beginning, not ending, with the coffee. The Comte de C. was a migratory bird whose flight obliged him at certain intervals to perch on the rigging of the home ship, but once strengthened by rest and refreshment there he again took wing, and disappeared before the luncheon guests had departed, carried away on a gale of his own enchanting vitality. The Comtesse, on the other

hand, was about to settle down to the routine of the afternoon.

Soon after two — we had lunched at one — the visitors began to arrive. She barely greeted them, one does not greet the striking of a clock, and the clocks in this house could have been set by the afternoon arrivals of these men, who for many years had made her house their habit. They entered therefore and took their seats, with scarcely an acknowledgement of their presence given or demanded.

They were not young men, but they were brilliant men who had done little with their lives but say witty things, and that is a difficult way of spending a longish life-time.

Each one had pegged out his concession in this little room. I don't know whether each had appropriated a chair, but that may not have been so, for there was little to choose between the discomfort of these. Comfortable or not, they remained seated in them for nearly two hours, and would have remained longer if the Comtesse had not risen to go. Her callers left reluctantly for the Club; later, some of them probably, for the *coulisses* of the Opera, where one could imagine them amongst the

mother-o'-pearl shimmer of white *tutus*, and sandalled feet.

They were jealous as tom-cats of one another, these men, and that was one of the reasons they never stayed away from the rue de Miromesnil. Above all the old were jealous of the young, and one felt the backs arch, and the hackles rise, when a new member was added to the group. And so the years passed by, and the young became the old and had to accommodate themselves in their turn to other newcomers. The Comtesse said to me one day, "*Mes vieux grognent, quand ils sentent la chair fraîche,*" and indeed, that was what happened in the *présence-chamber*.

In a little book the names of the callers were daily inscribed. When I visited her some years ago, she showed me two or three of these records. "*Il y a tant de morts là-dedans,*" she said, glancing sadly at the registers.

Whilst presiding over this assembly, seated in her arm-chair, she smoked Caporal cigarettes incessantly through an amber holder, which did not leave her lips whilst she talked, her head stiffly erect with its red-gold hair (the color of the angels') inherited



by her and by her daughter from their ancestress Laura, whom Petrarch's verse crowned with immortal beauty.

Round her neck she wore countless rows of small well-matched pearls, *colliers des jours* in very fact, for these pearls were added to yearly by her friends at Christmas and the New Year, and on her birthday.

In conversation she listened admirably, gave the *réplique* with unfailing resourcefulness, flung down or took up the challenge glove, drew in the more silent, drove out the most garrulous. *Les Vieux* did not smoke much, but they would occasionally gather strength for the next epigram by helping themselves to a Vichy lozenge out of a *bonbonnière* on the Comtesse's table.

During these afternoons in my school-girl days, I was relegated to Mademoiselle de C.'s bedroom after luncheon. Upstairs was the realm of Francis. Francis was the nurse. An Irishwoman who had lived with the family so long that she had all but forgotten her own language, and spoke execrable French with a rich Tipperary brogue. She trounced mother and daughter quite impartially, fed us children with large slices of plum-cake, flavored faintly

with rum, and was happy regaling me at the same time with stories in which the Comtesse seems to have fallen far short of her maternal ideal. "Ah, well I remember the day the child had measles, 39° of fever she had — and her mother went to the fancy-dress ball disguised as a mewgett —" (*muguet* — lily of the valley).

It was very soon after my introduction to the rue de Miromesnil that I heard from the mother's lips of her daughter's literary ambition and of her triumph. It appeared that the girl had decided to learn Provençal during the months of late summer that they spent in their southern home. Whilst the burning days succeeded each other monotonously, she felt like Melchior de Vogüé the fascination of that land where the Roman ruins lie trembling in the midday sun, "*sous la vapeur d'or, sur le pâle horizon d'oliviers d'où monte la plainte ardente des cigales.*"

Here, secretly, she made friends with Mistral, becoming a member of the Provençal literary society, *Société des Félibres*. Each year there is a competition for a prize poem written in Provençal. Without consulting her parents or her poet, she sent in a copy of verse. Her poem won the prize. In the



old amphitheatre at Arles, dressed in the Arlésienne costume, the prize-winner — a child of sixteen — declaimed her poem before an audience of thousands of spectators.

The Comtesse described her own emotions as she saw her girl standing before this vast audience, but as the opening words fell she heard a workman in the crowd call out, "*A la bonne heure, en voilà une qui gueule bien,*" which changed her tears to laughter.

Part of the summer itinerary of the Comtesse included a month at Deauville. Here, strangely enough, life outside the race-course seemed to alter very little.

In a hired villa, the same *côterie* established itself with the same intensity. The afternoons were unfortunately a little cut up by the racing, which the Comtesse loved to distraction. Her modest betting made her quite ill with emotion. Pale and tense, with clenched teeth, she would watch the horse that carried her fifty francs. If she was a loser the poor old gentlemen caught it. They themselves were utterly wretched transplanted into this alien soil, and sat about disconsolately fingering their walking sticks, whilst their Egeria bombarded owners, train-

ers, jockeys, and stable lads for tips, and bustled about ceaselessly for information in the paddock.

The complete transformation of that poised figure who from her chair in the rue de Miromesnil gave out her rulings on life in golden words or in mocking ones, unmasking the vanity of those who, like her, had not learned the excellent way, disconcerted them completely.

Four weeks of this life was enough for her, it was four weeks too much for some of her friends. Later the entire family removed itself to the Château de Serrant on the Loire. As guests of the Duc and Duchesse de la Tremoille, they stayed here till it was time to return to Paris, and here it was I stayed with them also.

On one occasion I remember arriving after having been very badly stung by mosquitoes in Switzerland. I hoped my sad plight would pass unnoticed, or that at any rate good manners would prevent any allusion being made to it, but that is not the French way. At each meal it was commented on in terms that left me in no doubt as to what I really looked like. "*Mon Dieu, ce qu'elle a été piquée!*" or, "*Est-il possible d'être piqué ainsi!*"



The Duc and Duchesse were great characters. He was a tall bearded man, of refinement and scholarship, pale and reserved, a distinguished ghost who belonged to the past. The Duchesse looked for all the world like the White Queen in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*. There was a story that she was so sensitive about her appearance that she never allowed a mirror in any of her houses. She adored her husband, and watched over him as a nurse watches over a delicate child, showering her considerable fortune on his property. He had the simplest tastes, and would never spend a penny on himself. His clothes were bought ready-made at *La Samaritaine*, and it was said that on one occasion when shopping there he gave his name and address for the parcel to be sent, the shabbiness of his appearance aroused suspicion, and the shop refused to give him credit.

At Serrant I got to know the Comtesse de C. more intimately, in those luscious lands watered by the generous Loire, which winds slowly past the castles of history.

The poplars were beginning to color, their yellow disks were fanned by light winds from October skies that scarcely ruffled the stretch of river below the

house. Swans floated idly under the drawbridge, only to turn round and float back again. There was a curious sense of arrested time. No mirrors here, only the sundial to trace the creeping shadow of life. The days lagged, dreamily relaxed, and the landscape repeated its brooding stillness in the water. A fairy-castle lay there, grey and turreted.

The Comtesse, leaning on the parapet of the terrace, would talk to me in a different language to any I had heard her speak in Paris or at Deauville. Perhaps during these hours we had passed together out of the real Château into that other submerged castle the towers of which lay below the sedges where the moorhen's metallic note stabbed the quiet air.

One day she said to me that tenderness was the rarest of all qualities, that it outweighed all others. It was the alabaster box of ointment — very precious. And when, in one of those moments of self-revelation which come to us in the companionship of a soul that has travelled far, I admitted that at times I had under-valued this inestimable gift, and the patience of the giver, "Do not," she said, "for in this world, *vois-tu, mon petit, tout s'use.*"

Yes, it was certainly here in Anjou that I got to

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know and love my friend. Her courage and clear vision — a certain brilliant hardness, a diamond quality of her intellect catching the rays of light and giving them back in the crude colors of the prism — had blinded me to other gifts. I began to realize later that this acute perception, this fearless vision, are the highest manifestations of the feminine mind, and that it is through these qualities that woman has secured for herself in France a different place to anything that her sentimental gropings have achieved for her in England.

The Englishwoman is at the same time too much and too little detached from herself. A woman's supremacy in a man's life in England is precarious, she has no security of tenure. Most probably she holds her property by the title-deeds of a pretty face — yet that superb confidence in herself which the Frenchwoman feels is never felt by the Englishwoman, who is on suffrance, always.

Once upon a time there was an Englishman who loved a woman madly, hopelessly, and for many months he besieged the citadel and never thought to win it. But at last she took pity on him, and murmured, "Yes — to-day. This afternoon." In the

twinkling of an eye his face changed. "Not to-day," he said blankly, "to-day I am playing polo." This is a man's country, one must not expect the impossible. Perhaps we have the English climate to blame, for a story in the eighteenth-century *Mémoires* of the Duc de Lauzun suggests that the flame of chivalry when transported across the Channel flickers and dies, for even his ardors were not proof against the sea-change.

In Paris the Duke fell a victim to the charms of Lady Sarah Bunbury, who first rebuffed him, but later slipped a note into his hand. On it she had written "I love you," which the Duke — good Frenchman that he was — was incapable of translating. Fortunately the language of love is Esperanto. The beautiful young woman explained that simple as these things are in France, in England they are more complicated, and though she could not bring herself to accept him as a lover she urged him, nevertheless, to stay with her in her country seat of Barton, in Suffolk. He followed her there, and her husband — fatuous Englishman that he was — left the young people together. A few days after the departure of Sir Charles, her Ladyship's

virtue succumbed, and the following morning whilst riding in the fine park, she put her lover to a fearful test by suggesting that they should fly together to Jamaica, there to pursue the course of their guilty love among the sugar canes and pineapples. The Duke begged for a few days' delay before committing himself to such a rash decision, and Lady Sarah, disgusted at his lukewarm reply, bade him farewell for ever.

The married woman in France has certainly got security of tenure. Nothing in the world can assail or weaken the position of the *femme légitime*. However unfaithful her husband, the *foyer* is a sacred thing, to him as much as to her, guarded by classical tradition as much as by Christian ethics. So marriage may be unhappy, but the children see no degradation of their home. A sense of true values has produced the long roll-call of the splendid women of France.

There is a memorial to the dead by Bartholomé in the Père la Chaise cemetery. The two central figures — a man and a woman — are passing through a dark gateway. Above it the inscription, "*Aux Morts*." On either side, a bas-relief represents



a procession of figures making their painful way to this same gateway. They are pitiful figures some of them, aged and maimed, blind and burdened. But the young man and woman heed them not.

So when I think of France, I see a youth eternally young and beautiful passing from the Known to the Unknown, from the Light into the Shadow, from the Living unto the Dead, but he is not alone — they are together, mated.

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*Les personnalités, il n'y a que cela d'intéressant, et
puis les relations entre personnalités.*

ANDRÉ GIDE.

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VI

MADemoiselle VALENTINO had whetted my appetite for art, but I now longed for a studio where work and workers were more serious. Possibly the facility I possessed scarcely justified this desire, but L. who shared it with me, was both gifted and accomplished. Thus it was I made an excursion to the land of artists; I came there without purse or scrip of real talent, but for a year I saw through their eyes, heard with their ears, learnt their speech, which is a simple one converting the soul, for the aim of these people is the highest expression of their powers.

In pre-motor days the Place Blanche seemed at the end of the world. One reached it if one was poor, in a bus drawn by tired horses that trailed slowly down the Batignolles; if one was rich in a *fiacre* which could scarcely get the distance. The yellow ones were the best, but even so one was fearful lest the wheels should drop off on the journey.

The coachmen were optimists and wore top-hats made of — what? The headgear of the Parsees in Bombay reminded me of this particular form of *papier mâché*, highly varnished.

It took three-quarters of an hour to reach the Place; by that time the horse could go no farther, it would have been impertinent to ask him to crawl up the steep gradient of the rue Lepic, so that part of the journey had to be covered on foot. There were a few shops in the rue Lepic — mostly confectioners. Glutinous *babas* and other cakes adorned the windows on wire trays, *madeleines*, *palmiers*, and *éclairs*, and at Christmas time a fine show of *fruits confits*, which remind me always of *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, the Comtesse de Ségur's nursery classic, when Sophie had earned for herself one of those many ingenious punishments inflicted on her by consuming a whole box of these crystallized fruits clandestinely. Poor Sophie, her misfortunes followed close-heeled on inventiveness — "*J'ai une idée!*" and it always ended badly, which may be said of all of us from Eve downwards.

Up the hilly rue Lepic, and you turn left-handed for the rue Cauchois — a *cul de sac* — at Number

15 you walk through a passage and find yourself in a court with studios round three sides. In the middle of it there used to be a débris of rocks surrounding a rococo pedestal, something between a fountain and a sun-dial. A fine old vine on a trellis roofed in part of the courtyard; it was cherished and venerated by the studio population of the courtyard.

The artists' doors were painted Indian red, some bore numbers, others had the visiting card of the owner, rain-stained and all but illegible, fastened on with four drawing pins. Mademoiselle Jouanne's had neither. One just knocked haphazard, and she came to the door to open it, all smiles, in her pink overall smeared with paint. Mademoiselle Jouanne was not pretty, but she had so much intelligence and such a mass of fluffy hair that it did quite as well. Her eyes were a little screwed up always, as if she were trying to see half-tones; they twinkled at one agreeably under her upward slanting eyebrows and her fringe of soft hair.

The studio was bare because she was poor, and she could not afford to have fine stuffs for backgrounds, or a piece of tapestry, or a good chair for

the model's throne. She could only have an easel, and a great many canvases piled against the wall. Two or three of her best pictures were hung on it. Occasionally she had flowers in the studio, but this was only when she was painting them, so they were generally a little faded and tired from their sittings, and in summer, when she was working for an order, they were kept alive by a block of ice.

So there was really nothing in the studio except Mademoiselle Jouanne and her pupils.

L. and I had met her at Krüg's studio, where she sometimes worked in the mornings to save herself the expense of a model. We had not liked it, and abandoned it for Julian's, over which Marie Bashkirtseff has thrown a fadeless glamor for English people. Julian's however was too large for us — it was the world — the struggle to get a good place for one's easel on Monday mornings amounted to a football scrum. L.'s energy was such that she arrived there whilst the charwoman was scrubbing the floor, so as to be certain of securing one. Late-comers had to be content to sit at the end of the room amongst a forest of easels, and though an occasional "*Dites-le moi si je vous bouche*" was thrown

at the back row by the early birds, one felt discouraged and handicapped. Corrections came twice a week. Bouguereau was correcting when we were at the rue de Berri. His sickly painting did not prevent him from being a fine draughtsman. He was very old and cross, and proportionately bored. The only person he was civil to was the model. "It's a charming pose, and a charming model, *hancez bien, Mademoiselle*," he would say with deference to a little gutter-snipe girl of seventeen, who immediately lost her languor, and gave more movement to the pose, hollowing her thin back, and throwing the whole weight of her small nude body on to one leg. To us his usual comment was "*Continuez*," grumbled into his beard, as he marked a wrong proportion with an angry charcoal. Whilst our model rested, we would wander into the sculpture room next door, where Puesch taught.

After the mornings at Julian's in all that crowd and clatter, it was pleasant to find oneself in the quiet courtyard at Montmartre, and to listen to Jouanne's teaching in her studio. She was an artist through and through, with poetic vision. All that she had learnt — and she had learnt a great deal —

was from a mysterious person next door whom she referred to continuously as "*le voisin*." His door would be pointed out to me as I passed it daily. His name was on it, above the bell, just Saubès, no Christian name appeared, and this was perhaps intentional, as his was Daniel, not a felicitous one.

Weeks passed without our meeting him. My curiosity about him was intense. Bit by bit we had pieced together the story of Jouanne by the things she had *not* told us. They had all three been friends at one time, Saubès and Madame Saubès and Mademoiselle Jouanne, and he had taught her to "see" beautifully. To see the passage that lies between the planes of light and shadow, to eliminate all that detail that is unnecessary and distracting (there is a Chinese proverb which they apply to art, it says: "The soul of the wheel is the space between the spokes"), to search for atmosphere always and everywhere, to see through the eye, and not through the reason. Half an hour with Jouanne and one knew that she had studied with an artist and with a poet, somebody who had been both for Mademoiselle Jouanne, and perhaps something more besides, who knows?

Once or twice, however, as we hurried for a mid-day snack, the Indian-red door of the "*voisin's*" studio stood ajar, and one heard voices. I had the feeling that we were being watched through it. We lunched at the Bouillon Duval, below the Place Blanche. It was not at all a restaurant typical of the artists' quarter. Accountants, shop-assistants, little bourgeois up from the country for the day on pleasure or business bent, composed its *clientèle*, but occasionally a *rapin* came in, wearing a black sombrero hat and a cape, and then one felt shades of Murger closing round. These young gentlemen were most of them Montmartre *chansonniers*, and as they sat down they asked dramatically for pen and paper before they consulted the menu. The muse they courted would command them before they got their teeth into the tough dish of veal. Our little friend Jouanne lunched in the studio, when she did not run home to her mother's apartment close by. She had the *estomac fatigué* and usually brought a bottle of milk, a fresh egg which she boiled on the stove, and a packet of rusks with her.

The autumn had flown by. I had caught at the crisp brown leaves that fell from the trees in the

Place du Carrousel. Each leaf caught is said to be a happy month, and these months had been supremely happy. New Year had come and gone. The shops had resumed their normal appearance. The huge trophies of flowers tied with taffeta ribbons for the New Year's gifts had dwindled to bouquets of more modest dimensions. February had returned, and the birds in the Parc Monceau were twittering amorously. One morning we arrived at the studio late. Mademoiselle Jouanne was absent. We opened the letter box, expecting a line from her to explain her absence. She had not written, but at the bottom of the box lay a handful of loose violets. Three days running the miracle repeated itself. We did not dare admit to ourselves that they were placed there by the "*voisin*." In life one is always afraid to stick a pin through one's butterfly! And if they had been, what reply can be made to some humid violets found in a letter box, a little bruised, but fragrant of earth and spring-time?

Jouanne's gastric trouble continued to keep her at home. Then one morning as we came up the courtyard, the "*voisin's*" door was wide, and he stood on its threshold. A tall, well-set-up figure,

wearing a dark blue *béret*. He greeted us with the bow of an acquaintance, and the smile of a friend. This indeed, was the beginning of our friendship with Saubès, or rather his friendship with L. I am afraid I did not interest him much, he looked upon me as a child still in her teens.

Saubès had already gleaned the meagre harvest of his talent. A good number of his pictures had been bought by the State for provincial galleries, he had numerous medals to his credit, but the golden sheaves were not his portion. There are too many laborers in the cornfields of artistic France.

His pictures have a note of infinite sadness. He painted cottage life with exquisite feeling. Gascon by birth, he knew, the secret of rough walls hot in the sun, and the interior of dark farm-buildings, where its rays steal in, catching the hem of a peasant's dress like an overbold swain. At this time he was working at a picture which was afterwards bought by Mademoiselle Lucie Faure — daughter of the President. His model for it was his wife, a lean hard-featured woman with a certain bitter grandeur in her aquiline head.

She was at once his wife, his model, and his serv-

ant. Renoir the painter said, "It is so pleasant to paint a woman's hands, I mean the kind of hands which are used to house-work." Poor Madame Saubès, her hands knew all about housework, they did little else.

But in the canvas he was painting she is seated with a child at her breast — the child that she had never borne him. One arm supports it, and with the other she is lifting a piece of drapery from the sleeping infant's limbs. Her head — her tragic, ravaged head — is turned to one side and half hidden by the bend of the upraised arm. The design is fitted into a circle with consummate skill. The tone is low and luminous. Saubès had spent a year in painting it, he could only work very slowly. I never heard what price he received for it — probably under two thousand francs.

It was during this same winter that we visited Besnard's studio. Madame Besnard received us, the artist had been called away. She was no longer young, her pale face and gray hair had the velvety quality of pastel, her beauty was a little full and fleshy, but her skin was pearl-like and seemed to attract the light. She reminded me of an over-

blown bloom of the white rose called Frau Karl Druschke. I think in England we changed its name during the war, as we could not intern the rose.

Madame Besnard's drawing-room was full of her husband's sketches. It was a luxurious room overful of everything, large divans covered with rich stuffs, a pleasing collection of objects gathered together anyhow, just as an artist's room should be. The eye rested gratefully on all these groups of satisfying form and color. She led us out of it into his studio, and talked with knowledge and fervor of his work. She showed us some of his water-colors, phenomenal in technique. He had the mastery over all mediums, and this most difficult of all he had dominated like the rest. She told us he usually started three or four water-color drawings of the same subject at the same moment, and he had invented a plan of drying them quickly by heat, so that one or other was always ready for the next wash, then as the difficulty of the medium defeated even his titantic skill, he would reject the failure which any other artist would have counted a success, and work on at the other beginnings. The aquarelle flowed off his brush, one tone laid over

the other in transparent films of pure color; the rainbow was his palette.

Madame Besnard showed us a set of his etchings — "*La Femme*" — terrible in their realism. Love, Travail, Birth, Maternity, Old Age, the acid that bit into his copper-plate was no less searching than his pitiless imagination fastening on truth.

The portrait of Madame Réjane was still on his easel at Besnard's studio at this time. She was a worthy subject for his brush, for it required an artist of his supreme intelligence to translate an *esprit* like hers. I think it was shown in London the following year. The picture has an English eighteenth-century flavor. He has painted her at a moment of swift movement as Sir Joshua chose to paint some of his sitters. The lighting suggests the glare of the footlights. He has arrested her as she was running off the stage, pulsating with her talent, responding to the acclamations of hundreds who nightly hailed her as the greatest *comédienne* of her generation. This picture and the nude woman's back at the Luxembourg are his works best known to English people, but the frescoes in the School of Pharmacy in Paris, and the Stations of the Cross in the Chapel at Berck

(an *ex-voto* for the recovery of his son) are evidences of his grander moods. In 1912 Besnard came to India and lunched with me at Calcutta. He was purporting a book of Indian sketches to be entitled "*L'homme en rose*." That day he delighted us by his conversation. His large inactive body was the antithesis to his agile mind and the lightness of his wit. It was the beginning of the hot weather, and he had had to attend some public function before luncheon. He arrived at my house perspiring freely. He would, I am sure, have liked to take off the frock-coat he was wearing, but decency forbade, so all he said was, "Forgive me for presenting myself in this ridiculous *costume de menuisier*."

Besnard told me he was intoxicated by the light of the East, for the artist, like the philosopher, calls out ever for light and more light, "though it slay me."

In thinking over those days that are connected with studios and artists, I see in sharp contrast these two painters, Besnard and Saubès, the known and the unknown. Fame will not come to Saubès after his death, as it has come to others, almost impertinently, who like him died in want, and whose pictures real-

ized large sums before the grass had grown green on their graves — "*Oh, c'est un terrible ironiste que l'avenir,*" wrote Le Maistre.

Saubès belonged to what has been called the school of Intimist painters. He painted, as he saw them, the simple things. His artist's vision does not attempt to translate the great mysteries of Life through any symbolism of his own. The overtone of the world's tragedy wakes a vibration in the soul through some familiar object, or rather by that which lies beneath it. His best picture was bought for his native town of Bayonne by the government. It represents the Last Sacraments being brought to the cottage of a dying peasant. The priest, in full vestments is entering, preceded by an acolyte who is carrying a *cierge*. The candle in the distant recess by the bedside gives the only other light in an interior rich with velvety shadows. On each side of the door, figures kneel reverently for the passing of the Sublime Mystery.

The Viaticum of the true artist is the consciousness that he has dealt faithfully with the highest ideal.

The evening of Saubès' life was calm. He had lost

all worldly ambition. His wife, the gaunt companion of his labors, had won him in his last years. His dark eyes did not detach themselves from her, or from the canvas on which he threw the sage observation of a life-time. His painting was patient, as was his life; he would not admit disappointment in either.

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*Passons, passons, puisque tout passe.
Je me retournerai souvent.
Les souvenirs sont cors de chasse
Dont meurt le bruit parmi le vent.*

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE.

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VII

AGNES BERRY, my schoolroom-maid, was brushing my hair one evening at Gisburne. It was a few months before the family exodus to Paris. My bedroom was dappled with firelight, and faintly lit by the bedroom candlestick which she relentlessly carried away with her to preclude reading in bed.

"Do you see that bit in the paper dear, we are going to have horseless carriages soon ——"

"Oh, *Agnes*" — but her words came true; and it was at Vaux le Vicomte that I had my first experience of them. It was thanks to Monsieur Bocher, of course, that we were invited to go to the Château. Monsieur Sommier, a wealthy sugar-refiner and an antiquarian of repute, wanted him to accompany us there on a Saturday to Monday visit. We accepted with cordiality, but Monsieur Bocher looked upon this as a hazardous enterprise — like all Frenchmen, no inducement could persuade him to *dé-*

coucher, so as Melun is only an hour's journey from Paris, he went down there with us, but returned the same day.

The party at the Sommier's was not an exciting one. It consisted largely of family, and two or three typical Frenchmen whose conversation was like the hum of machinery — insistent if you listened to it, but when you abstracted your mind, becoming a purely negligible output of extraneous activity.

Monsieur Sommier was a desiccated man of sixty odd. You might safely have pressed him in a book without placing blotting-paper between the leaves. His beard grew sparsely in such arid soil, and his small light figure seemed to have been wrung out of shape when the last drop of human juice had been extracted from him.

Madame Sommier was just the reverse; soft and plump, she could never adapt her figure or her mentality to the rigorous seventeenth-century setting in which she languished. She was a feather-bed laid upon a sarcophagus. Her life must have been a ceaseless sighing after a more clement environment.

Her children shared none of her uneasiness. A son and a daughter. Edme Sommer (no accent on the second e, the name is monosyllabic) was a cultured young man, with vigilant manners, a little sandy and myopic, yet perfectly adequate. The miasmas of the *Grand Siècle* had not befogged his healthy outlook on life, as was the case with his erudite papa.

His sister, a child whom a de Vogüé — nephew of the writer — had recently led to the altar, had the diffident appeal of a bride, bolstered up by the confidence inspired by a black velvet Paquin dress, and a string of pearls worthy of the Sommer millions. The marriage had given satisfaction all round, as is the case with nine out of ten marriages in France. The son-in-law's fine name, good appearance, and distinguished *provenance* struck a harmonious note in the Château. He added *faubourg* life to the sterile beauty of the interior. Had he not done so, Monsieur Sommer would doubtless have spirited him away to the limbo to which he consigned all newspapers, books, writing materials, in fact anything that contributed a semblance of reality to the museum deadness of the house, in which the gods

and goddesses of the splendid ceilings by Mignard and Le Brun smiled down on us poor out-of-place mortals, cutting our pioneer path through this crude century, whilst they planed serenely above.

Outside the windows the celebrated gardens deployed themselves graciously. Vistas led the eye cunningly to the desired points; perspective duped the vision by doubling the distance. In the basins of fountains, tritons and naiads waved their tridents; or a hoary Neptune held a nymph for ever in his stone embrace. Waters splashed everywhere, the statues weathered under their slow action and the march of time. Whilst smoking his cigar on the terrace, Monsieur Sommier's thoughts turned continually to his illustrious predecessor at Vaux, the great Fouquet, finance minister of Louis XIV, creator of the Château and of all its glories. Patron of the arts, Molière and La Fontaine were his friends. Le Vau had been his architect. Le Nôtre had designed his gardens. After the death of Mazarin, Fouquet had hoped to succeed him as Prime Minister — but when the gifted but unscrupulous statesman was called upon to render an account of his stewardship, the *surintendant's* high-handed pecu-

lation was discovered by Colbert, and after a trial which lasted three years, Fouquet, whose head narrowly escaped the scaffold, was imprisoned for life and died after twenty years of captivity. In his disgrace fairweather friends turned from him, but others, chief amongst whom was Madame de Sévigné, fought gallantly for his cause. She had been greatly admired by him, and scandalous tongues had not hesitated to wag on the subject of their relations. Although whilst the trial lasted the Marquise was engaged in launching on the choppy sea of social life her daughter, Madame de Grignan, of whom she wrote "*Sa beauté brûlera le monde*," she followed the prosecution of her "*cher malheureux*" with anguish, and wrote twelve letters on the subject to the Marquis de Pomponne which are among her finest.

Eloquent appeals were made on behalf of Fouquet by La Fontaine and Péliçon (himself imprisoned in the Bastille). The celebrated advocate, deprived of ink and paper, wrote his three *Discours au Roi* on the margin of his books with lead extracted from the window panes. A romantic story, but ending badly.

It is no wonder the sugar-king's musings often



led him this way, and at the twilight hour perhaps the *surintendant's* ghost, fondly haunting this same terrace-walk, would nudge his elbow to attract his attention, bow, and retire.

The Sunday of our visit was a brilliant winter's day. Monsieur Edme proposed a promenade *en auto*. It was the first time we had heard the phrase used, but we knew that this treat was in store for us. My *modiste* had thoughtfully provided me with a turquoise velvet toque for the occasion, in which two or three eagle's feathers (*couteaux* they were called) had been jauntily stuck. In her shop, rue St. Honoré, we had agreed that this was a bewitching and suitable headgear. My coat was dark blue, sewn with braids and fastened with "Brandebourgs" (frogs); it had a military feeling.

The Panhard drove to the door. A spasm contracted Monsieur Sommier's features as it stood panting in the forecourt, belching out mephytic vapor and defiling the smooth-raked gravel with black oleaginous droppings. Edme, however, was not to be denied. We seated ourselves in the *tonneau*, where we sat palsied with involuntary noddings till the machine chose to start.



The forest was our destination — and strange to say we got there. Our charioteer's monocle spatch-cocked his eyelashes, his appearance was barely human in a cap with patent-leather brim and a goat-skin overcoat (*peau de bique*). Always correct, his small talk did not flag, the man at the wheel's words were blown back to us from the driving seat as we rattled and bobbed about behind him.

The landscape flew past us, tears filled our un-goggled eyes. The icy wind sang in my ears. I do not suppose that at any moment we were travelling more than twenty miles an hour, but it seemed the end of this world and very likely the beginning of the next. Impossible to express the rapture I felt. The eagle's feathers or were they goose-quills — anyway I felt like an eagle myself — one by one were blown from the turquoise toque. The road skated from under us. Here was the Forest, these gnarled oaks, these slabs of rock, this light undergrowth of seedling chestnuts, through which, despite my involuntary tears, I saw mysterious pools of water coated with dark ice.

When we halted at a *carrefour*, I thought of my father's own childhood spent at Fontainebleau. I



seemed to see him, a slim boy on one of his father's discarded race-horses, his faithful squire Isidore beside him. My grandmother, too, in her wide leghorn hat trimmed with floating ribbons, and Second Empire muslin dress wandering through these glades followed by young children, their hot hands full of wilting wild flowers. The *barouche* of the Hôtel d'Angleterre standing by, flies buzzing round the heads of the sweating horses — that was her *promenade en forêt*, and this was mine.

Edme turned the car with difficulty, one wheel shaving the ditch, and in less than no time, we were back at the Château, where a sumptuous *goûter* awaited us. A great deal of pastry and foie-gras, cold ham, and straw-colored tea, a great many gloved footmen and silver salvers.

That evening we sat disconsolately on the magnificent furniture — fauteuils and settees covered with mellow Beauvais. Each curve of arm and back a separate ecstasy. The footstools themselves were of the period. Tapestries let into the panelling recorded scenes of *fêtes galantes*, rose-colored dresses detached themselves from dove-colored backgrounds, shepherds and rustics, cavaliers and ladies

frolicked in smiling pastures, blues and greens faded into honey-color.

It was impossible to move a chair on the burnished parquet without creating an unwelcome diversion. Monsieur Sommier's conversation flowed like a stream of sand. Madame Sommier watched anxiously for the arrival of the *tisanes* of lime and camomile, the signal for bed-time. The young couple eyed each other. Edme — always resourceful — suggested a game in the billiard room. There was a great relief all round when we abandoned the older people. Monsieur Sommier was explaining the notable ceiling by Le Brun when we left him. His guests were suffering the discomforts of the sightseer whose neck is partially dislocated.

I heard the lines of Lafontaine's poem in praise of this painting being declaimed in my host's voice which creaked with dryness:

*"Voyez l'autre plafond où la Nuit est tracée,
Cette divinité, digne de vos autels
Et qui même en dormant fait du bien aux
mortels."*

The young folk began to revive, we played a kind of billiard-fives.

Madame de Vogüé's stroke was always too feeble. Her spouse took exception to it — "*Un biftek, mon amie,*" he would call out to her.

There was a little jollity here at least, the blight of the Grand Monarque seemed to lift.

Bed-time, it came at last. Our rooms were beautiful, but comfortless and chilly. The walls ornamented by grey panelling. The beds draped in yellow damask, with baldaquins stretched across the corner of the room cutting off the angle. Rich tassels held in place the billowing festoons.

Hot water for our ablutions had to be carried upstairs from the kitchen in a sequence of small jugs. The woman who brought it was one of the two *lingères*; there were no other female servants in the house though thirty men-servants were employed. A carafe of orange-flower water, with glasses, stood on a table in each bedroom (said to calm the nerves). The Château felt extremely eerie at night. The alcove made the bed forbidding and shadowy. My heart sank as I closed the door behind me.

A log fell off the fire and lit the room garishly for a few minutes — during which time I was emboldened to make sure that there were no spooks

lurking in the recess, no burglars behind the window curtains. When I drew them aside and looked out, a wide-faced moon was riding placidly above Le Nôtre's terrace, the statuary looked black, so did the water. Who but a genius could have traced the symmetry of these spacious gardens? It is said of their designer that when Louis XIV sent him to Rome to show his plans to the Pope, in the exuberance of the artist that is being appreciated he embraced His Holiness on both cheeks. The story — told in the *ruelle* at a *levée* of the monarch — seemed incredible, until the King assured his courtiers that Le Nôtre greeted him in the same manner each time he returned from a victorious campaign.

When Louis le Grand, to reward his architect for the laying out of the gardens at Versailles, presented Le Nôtre with armorial bearings, he chose for these a head of cabbage supported by snails (*rampant*), and was disappointed that he had not been able to include a rake upon the coat of arms.

It was comforting now to turn inwards, to glance back at the room. The bed was beckoning. To enter it was to enter a habitation.

The French have never — except in hotels —

adopted the hideous Victorian hygiene that travestied the sumptuous beds of earlier days into rigorous brass and iron frames. That kind of bed one gets *on to*, not *into*. The brass bed is just a little island laid open to the weather, not a magic country to be explored in sleep. The right kind of bed is not only another country but another climate, for when the world is cold, bed is warm, and when hot, it is cool. Bed is not only accommodating to all weathers, but to all moods. If you are depressed you sink more deeply into a slough of melancholy, yet it is the kind of sadness that is endurable. Bodily ease is recuperative to the spirit, and though bed, like too sympathetic a friend, does not brace, it vivifies through the miracle of sleep. Troubles drop into perspective — you divest yourself of them as you do of your clothes.

A new bed and a new and disturbing train of thought; after a vigil spent tossing on a strange bed, one cannot question the wisdom of Monsieur Bocher and his compatriots in refusing stoutly to *découcher*, but the return to one's own bed is the return of Ulysses to Penelope!

Beside these golden hangings in the days of the

ruelle, how many lyrics must have been sung to the frail accompaniment of lute and dulcimer extolling the no less frail virtues of some Corise or Delphine. But the bed itself must murmur its own barcarolle to the end — the song that tells of love, of birth, of death.

The *eau de fleurs d'oranger* — I had drunk a spoonful or two — was beginning to take effect. I remembered with satisfaction that St. Theresa did not condemn prayers said in bed. The soul unfretted by the body can surrender itself more completely to spiritual indwelling. Under my yellow canopy I began to think of St. Ursula in the Carpaccio picture. Her bed is a symbol of prayer and vision — pure as the angel that is appearing to her bearing a chalice from which rays of light are still streaming to us.

I heard the gravel crunching under the night-watchman's feet — somewhere in the Château a clock struck. Good-night Vaux.

*Ce n'est pas assez de faire entendre ce qu'on dit,
il faut encore le faire voir.*

JOUBERT.



VIII

ANNA BIGOT was my governess in the rue Pauquet days. She was a young woman with eyes like moss-agates and a highly excitable manner. Her father — a judge — had died young, and she had supported her family ever since. Her mother, an indolent Italian, born in Corsica, subsisted on a small pension from the State and the earnings of this daughter. As we sat over lessons, something we were reading would suddenly recall her family circle to her and tears would moisten the moss-agates for a second. It was during one of these moments of emotion that we arranged that we should go together to visit her home at Haze-brouck.

It was the middle of April when we got there. The north of France was still bleak, but magpies on the flat lands were building their nests, and the grey blight of winter had begun to lift.

Madame Bigot received me cordially. She must have been under fifty, but she had the heavy movements of a much older woman. Her head was Roman — a pure classical type. She seemed to me the counterpart of Letitia Ramolini, Napoleon's mother, who said of the flight of her eagle "*Pourvu que ça dure,*" and like Letitia Ramolini, Madame Bigot's French was spiced with a strong Italian accent. There was a faint aroma of crêpe and garlic about her always. She snoozed the days away in an untidy arbor at the bottom of the garden. Each fine morning with a shawl over her head she would dawdle down to her seat there, her felt slippers shuffling along the path and raising the dust, her skirt dragging in it. From the arbor she was in sight and ear-shot of the kitchen, and every now and then her querulous voice would be raised in some protest to her second daughter Louise, who would come to the window, and nod her patient head. Louise's very soul seemed calloused over by work, her glance had the furtive restlessness of one who is always waiting for a pot to over-boil, for an iron to cool, for a voice to call.

The beginning and end of Madame Bigot's day

was the return of her son Jules from Lille; he was a student at the Faculté de Médecine. Jules wore a black felt hat, shaped like a boater, anchored to his collar by a guard. His Venetian-red beard was a source of pleasure to his mother, the Judge had worn the like. Jeanne's good looks too satisfied her. Jeanne, her youngest daughter, was seventeen. Her face was round and calm, cut across by sweeping eyebrows. Her blue eyes looked gravely, almost stupidly, at you.

There is a description of *Eugénie Grandet* that I have never forgotten: Balzac describes her eyebrows as calm horizons, I could not look at Jeanne without remembering it. Jeanne had inherited her mother's inertia, and by virtue of her beauty she had been waited on all her life. Her hands lay for the greater part of the time folded in her lap, too idle to pick up her needlework, and from her red plush chair by the window she would watch continually the coming and going of the small town, the arrival of the postman, the passage of the station omnibus.

The mornings hung rather heavily. The weather was unpropitious. Sharp showers of rain stung the

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window panes. The little street with its alignment of colored houses opposite swam with water after these April showers. Umbrellas appeared in it like crops of mushrooms, and then disappeared as a heatless sun gilded the little Place at the end, the steeple of the church, and the classical façade of the Hôtel de Ville. In our goloshes Louise and I would do the housekeeping. A visit to the pork-butcher to purchase pig's trotters — a favorite dish with the Bigots — or one to the grocer to come back with a loaf of *pain d'épice*.

In the afternoons, however, we paid visits to the notability of the town. Pink champagne and biscuits were handed round in my honor. When these calls were returned, we offered our visitors a modicum of marmalade in a saucer. Anna had brought a pot of Keiller's from England. It was eaten with a teaspoon and a rusk, and voted an English delicacy.

The house was sparsely furnished. Poverty cried aloud in it. There seemed no trace left of the ease of earlier years to which the family would often refer. I had not been a minute in the house before Madame Bigot explained to me an enormous canvas which covered one of the walls of the sitting room.

It was labelled "The Rape of the Sabines." The composition was confused. It took me quite a little while to discover that it was not a study of octopuses in an aquarium. A welter of arms and legs, human and equine, twisted themselves in an inchoate mass below an indigo sky. Above these bituminous limbs a shaft of light that never came from sun or moon cleft the clouds. The panel was enormous and reached from floor to ceiling. "This," said Madame Bigot, "is the Titian. It has been in my family for centuries. My grandmother was a Venetian," she added conclusively. It would have been just as convincing if she had said: "My grandmother was a Sabine."

Once we made an expedition to Armentières. It took the whole day in a hired landau. And sometimes Jules would invite a fellow student to supper. He was a young man in eye-glasses whose manner to Jeanne left me in no doubt as to his intentions. Madame Bigot too, had a proprietary manner towards him. Louise would turn out an especially excellent meal on these days. A vinaigrette sauce with the slabs of cold veal, or she would make a *crème renversée* which I was disappointed to find was not

cream at all, but my old enemy, caramel pudding.

The young people were never left alone together, and Jeanne's animation was not increased by her swain's presence, but there was a general feeling that things were going well. Jules used to mention casually his friend's prospects — they were rosy, he was the only son of his father, a *rentier* whose income, quoted to me in francs, was staggering. A Rothschild's fortune beside it appeared a mere bagatelle.

Anna, when she was alone with me, would burst into ecstatic anticipation of Jeanne's beauty as a bride. Gaston Hentsch — that was the young man's name — was also introduced to the Sabines. Madame Bigot would murmur "*Un chef-d'œuvre, d'une valeur énorme.*" In an aside to me she would whisper asthmatically that the picture became Jeanne's property the day she married. It would be made over to her in lieu of *dot*.

Palm Sunday came. The weather was brighter, but still blustery. The streets were full of *premières communiantes* blown about like belated snow-flakes left behind by winter. Their long white veils suggested bridal wreaths to Jeanne, whose eyes

followed them kindly. In the garden the double daffodils were out, and shivered against the partition wall. The rose over the arbor was putting on emerald leaves.

In the afternoon I went to the Presbytery with Louise. Her overworked needle had been darning some church linen, mending it finely, the thread exactly crossed so that the darn became a perfect weave, a chess-board of precision. The *Curé* gave me some holy pictures, he was a gentle soul whose spectacles bit deeply into his nose. Some of the cards were framed in paper cut like lace, like old-fashioned Valentines, others were glazed in blue talc; each bore an Easter greeting.

Madame Bigot was irritable. She could not bear Louise's labors to be deflected for an instant from her personal needs.

"*Tu es une véritable puce de sacristie,*" she flung after her, as we started down the cobbled street. Louise as usual was in a hurry, a supper-party was expected. The *rentier*, Gaston's father, was bringing a friend from Paris.

They came. The friend from Paris was a beady-eyed Jew. His conversation was alert. After the

coffee the double doors between the dining-room and the parlor were thrown open, the guests were invited by a sweeping gesture from Madame Bigot to view the Titian. The *rentier* cleared his throat and watched his friend, whose restless gaze embraced the Sabines for one fateful moment. The acetylene gas under a fringe of beads seemed an ideal lighting for it.

The party broke up soon afterwards. Madame Bigot in commenting on its success, said to me, "One could see the gentleman was 'amateur,' the beauty of the Titian struck him dumb (*'ça lui a coupé la parole'*)."

After this the cards were laid on the table. The stimulus of the sweet champagne, the generosity of the fare, the geniality of the guests had loosened all our tongues when we were once more alone. Jeanne threw off her habitual calm.

A week elapsed — an undercurrent of expectation kept the family happy. Anna only expressed a mild wonder that Gaston should not have called again, but Jules told us that he was in Paris. The School of Medicine was enjoying a holiday

It was on Easter morning that Madame Bigot received a letter. Bells had rung all the morning,

some peremptory and shrill, others deep-throated and slower, and then in an interval of silence, from the Convent chapel near by, the bell of the Sanctus like three beads strung on an invisible thread of faith.

The family had returned from church, letting in through the front door a draught of morning air and sunshine. We had gathered round the table for coffee. There were no horse-shoe rolls — (Sunday) — but household bread a little stale and bitter, cut in diagonal slices. Madame opened her letter.

Her crêpe veil hung becomingly round her heavy shoulders. Even to my young eyes she looked beautiful that day.

"*Enfin*," she said as she sliced open the envelope with her knife. She read in silence. Louise was bustling with the cups. Jules was in bed. Jeanne was watching with her slow eyes.

I saw the letter myself a few minutes later.

"Madame," it began, "as you have evinced (*témoigné*) to my son a kindness that I can only describe as maternal, I would like you to be one of the first to receive the joyful news of his engagement to my niece, his cousin, Mademoiselle Lucie Allemand."

Followed a few admirable sentiments on the relations of father and son which would not have disgraced Fénelon. Indeed, I doubt whether the *cygne de Cambrai* could have expressed them better, or as well. Under the florid signature there was a post-script.

"My friend Monsieur Meyer, who had the honor of being received by you last Sunday, is, as no doubt you realized, a connoisseur of the first order. His opinion is worth having. He pronounced your picture to be not a Titian, but of the school of Schiavone, *notez bien 'school.'* As such it has no value, except, of course, the sentimental one which we must both admire and respect."

Madame Bigot pushed the letter across to Anna.

"*Voilà un beau poisson d'Avril,*" she said unsteadily. Her jet ear-rings quivered.

Then her glance rested on Jeanne, who began to flush slowly, she knew not why. "Poor child," she sighed, and the crêpe trappings stirred on her full bosom.

I left for England the next day. Jeanne had cried all night, and had no beauty left. Louise had cried too, but then her nose was always a little red.

■

Nous retrouverons bientôt ce que nous avons perdu. Nous en approchons tous les jours à grands pas. Encore un peu, et il n'y aura plus de quoi pleurer. C'est nous qui mourons, ce que nous aimions vit, et ne mourra point.

FÉNELON.



IX

MY father's scheme had succeeded in so far that these years of my girlhood had given me what his own youth had given him — a passionate love of France.

We were able henceforth to exchange our experiences of the pleasant land, to encourage the pale ghosts of his past to foregather with the glowing personalities of my present. We listened together to the tongue that he had heard in his cradle, as one listens to the song of birds clear and rapturous, and yet carrying with it the melancholy of remembered happiness.

There were other problems to think of now besides those raised by the Cours Knoertzer, the rejected Henri Lütz, the dejected Luigi Cardini. It seemed only fair that as I had borne the heat and burden of the day of the schoolgirl in Paris, I should have at least a glimpse of the world that opens to the French *débutante*. My uncle Reginald Lister

had come to the Embassy as First Secretary, and this was his wish as much as it was mine. It was amusing to him to take out an English niece in Paris, rather like taking a Labrador sporting dog to a shooting-party in France. To pursue this simile I don't know whether I picked up very much, but I enjoyed myself madly, as the circle that surrounded him opened to me.

He threw himself into the fun it brought to us both, with that intoxicating zest which he brought to all things in life — the grave and the gay — "*La vie sortait de lui*," as Renan said of Monsieur Dupanloup.

It was the year of the Paris Exhibition. In the foreign section the Pavillon Anglais was a reproduction of a beautiful old manor, Kingston House at Bradford-on-Avon. It was to be filled with fine specimens of English furniture, and hung with English pictures. King Edward — then Prince of Wales — was anxious that the best examples of our eighteenth-century school should be shown there. He arranged to lunch at my grandfather's, Sir Charles Tennant's, house in order to secure the loan of the gems of his collection. I have a vivid recollection

of the predatory attitude of the Prince, and the piteous effort on my grandfather's part to hold back certain of his treasures, for he was torn between his pride in exhibiting them and his disinclination to denude his walls. He was a bird watching its nest being robbed.

There came a painful moment when he was asked, a little hectoringly, so I thought, to lend "Miss Ross" by Raeburn, the lovely creature in black who eternally mourns for her dead lover. My grandfather was no less tender than her lost suitor, and he put up a fight to keep her with him. When my mother appeared to be supporting him in his reluctance the Prince threatened her with imprisonment in the Tower if she persisted.

Then other pictures were chosen. Two Morlands that breathed English country life. "Boys robbing an Orchard" and "Children playing at Soldiers," with backgrounds of ripe English trees in the "green delicious plenitude of June." To Paris they all went, carrying with them that native loveliness which is peculiar to the English schools. Eighteenth-century English art is as far removed from the painting of the same period in France as

the primitives are removed from the impressionists. The unlikeness of our great epoch of portrait painting to anything they possess has made the French admire our artists enthusiastically. The elegance that Gainsborough and Sir Joshua have bequeathed to us is essentially an English elegance.

Paris was transmographed for the Exhibition. The Grand and Petit Palais and the Pont Alexandre III are all that remains of this vast encampment. These were much pilloried at the moment, but the flight of time has married them — morganatically at least — to their surroundings. They have found their place amongst the architecture of happier eras, and do not strike a discord.

Strange how Paris can assimilate the many uncouth objects she is forced to swallow. By some enchantment all her own, possibly by the magic of her incomparable atmospheric effects, she is able to lend them the beauty they lack, so that at certain hours and under certain skies the Eiffel Tower itself becomes as romantic as the Campanile of Giotto.

The summer of the Exhibition year was fine. There seemed to be a great deal of entertaining. The Secretaries at our Embassy were all that the heart

could desire. The Ambassador, Sir Edmund Monson, swayed and swept with an almost automatic dignity; his noble gestures amounted to a reflex action. Lady Monson was unable to sustain this high level. Gentle and pretty she twittered softly in the background. The Embassy was shabby inside, and still bore traces of the disastrous taste of the Louis Philippe epoch. The garden was enchanting, leafy, inviting, its glades haunted by the shade of Pauline Borghese.

Thanks to my uncle I was invited that year to many balls. I lived at night in a whirl of cotillon ribbons, fans, bells, toys, and nonsense. I compared the young Frenchmen I danced with unfavorably with their English contemporaries. Their conversation was as stiff as their shirt-fronts were soft. General Galliffet, watching their evolutions from the doorway of a ballroom, grumbled to my uncle, "*Tout ça, c'est de la pourriture.*" He should have waited until 1914 before condemning them.

France is the country of youth, she loves it, condones it, draws from it half her inspiration and all her emotion, *mes vingt ans, ses vingt ans*, and she grows lyrical, but there is no doubt that the French-

man is better when he is mature. Perhaps you should lay him down as you do a vintage wine.

My father had a story of a young Parisian who, on entering the Jockey Club, to which he had recently been elected, said diffidently, "Forgive me, *ce n'est pas une question très sport, mais quelle heure est-il?*" That shows the right spirit anyway.

Amongst all this golden youth I remember one young man — he was a de Gontaut I believe — with whom I discussed the good looks of a young American woman. She was like a statuette by Falconet, long-limbed with a small impertinent head that did not boast a single good feature. "Ah," sighed my partner, who was suffering the sharp pains of calf love (we were whirling round the ball-room of Madame Porgès) "Mrs. — has the most beautiful legs in the world." Even at this distance of time I remember my blushes. Visions of Fragonard's "Heureux hasards de l'Escarpolette" danced before my outraged vision. Where and how could he have seen them? For we were living in an age of legless womanhood. The flounces and frills of our skirts ensnared the inexperienced dancer. They tore at the first step, wound themselves round the furniture, tied up the

tyro couple, and other innocent couples besides. When the valse ended many a dress was ruined and the dancing-floor was strewn with tattered tulle.

The *Bal Blanc* was not much in vogue in my day, young and old married women came to all those to which I was invited. Queen of beauty amongst the French girls was Mademoiselle Pauline de Saint-Sauveur (now Marquise de Labord). Her beauty lit every party like an added lamp, and of the young married women the Vicomtesse de Janzé was the loveliest.

I should not have enjoyed this gay vortex if my uncle had not been with me always, it was not only the fun of going to the parties with him but the amusement we derived in discussing them afterwards. There was something about him that had an irresistible appeal to the French, he was wanted and *fêté* by them always. His supple intelligence seemed allied to theirs. Life abroad had not had the effect of making him cosmopolitan in any sense. He preserved his strong English characteristics, but he had a delicacy of perception, a facile grace of mind, and above all a gaiety which brought him close to the Latin mentality. His appreciation of beauty,

whether in people, in art, or in nature was intense; his enthusiasms for it were perhaps a little extravagant, but this was because he saw more of it, for he was like the sun, he brought out color, light, and shade in everything he approached. To be in his company was to become witty and agreeable, his nearness was an endowment to others of all those qualities he admired and which he himself possessed.

He had what St. Beuve calls no "*disposition à l'ennui*," so dullness could not exist where he was, and if disappointment came in the shape of a grey day, or a tedious gathering, he triumphed over it — he could turn the stones into bread. Paris was the place he loved best, it was a frame that became him admirably, but as happiness was natural to him, he carried it with him to every post, and forged for himself delights in every capital to which he was sent.

During the years he was Councillor of Embassy in Paris, his apartment was rue de Poitiers, in a fine old house *entre cours et jardin*, where he occupied the *entresol*. It was an apartment of long low rooms, which he had arranged cleverly. Furniture and pictures he had bought all his life with taste and

knowledge, and his possessions dropped into place wherever he put them in his wanderings, for things, like people, seemed at their ease with him. In decoration he knew just what was needed.

Parties given by him in these mellow rooms were not very frequent, but I shall not forget those to which I went. The host took infinite pains about his entertainments, but when the invited arrived he threw off all responsibility and became as carefree as any of the guests, and as determined to enjoy himself. I seem to see again amongst that company the beautiful oval of Lady Ripon's face and the magical splendor of her eyes. I can recall the movements, words, and gestures of that group of elegant and cultivated people which my uncle had collected around him.

Amongst these Maurice Baring was the spoilt child, and all the better loved and understood because he was unlike anybody else. When General Galliffet put him up for the Union Club, he said to my uncle, "*Il a passé comme une lettre à la poste.*"

Reynaldo Hahn made music for us — it went straight to one's head like new wine. And sometimes Melba sang, and through the open windows


her notes, liquid as a blackbird's, woke the echoes of the sleeping Faubourg; and she would sing and sing again, for her host was one of those people who can evoke in artists their most perfect artistry.

These parties were the best, others were just talk and bridge. As my uncle would allow nothing to be flat for me, he would give me a vested interest in the game. His winnings were ear-marked to buy me a hat. From time to time I would enquire how the game went; when the score piled up in his favor the players would call out: "*C'est un superbe Gainsborough, garni de plumes,*" and when the cards were less kind, "*Hélas, Mademoiselle, ce n'est plus qu'un tout petit canotier*" (a plain straw), for these were the days before hats were standardized; indeed, I remember a drive to the races with the Ambassador on a day on which I wore a large one trimmed with *volubilis* (convolvulus). In the block of carriages, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, a hungry cab-horse immediately behind us began to graze off these charming flowers. The felts of to-day would not have tempted him.

The house in Paris which I loved best to go to visit with my uncle was that of the Comtesse de

Béhague, rue St. Dominique. Each room here was a delight, and the fine staircase which led to them, with its Savonnerie carpet, dark blue like the bottom of the sea. The round library lined with ripe panelling, the cool marbles of the dining-room, the whole house was a granary where generations of taste had harvested only the finest grain. Downstairs there were rooms which the owner had invited Dampé the sculptor to decorate. He was to treat them as an experimental field for the ingenuity of modern decorative design. The Byzantine music-room with pale gold walls was successful, but there were others which were less so. In one of them there was a statuette of the *Fée Mélusine* and her human lover. The two figures could be spanned by the hand, and are as lovely as the work of Cellini. Mélusine is in ivory, and her fish's tail is studded with diamonds. I could never tire of looking at this pale fairy who would have bartered all her magic to obtain a human form. Alas poor Mélusine — it's the old story. "*Nous employons aux passions l'étoffe qui nous a été donné pour le plaisir.*"

I have to confess that this cycle of parties did not result in my securing for myself anything more



serious than an adequate number of dancing partners, certainly not a lover, or even a fish's tail, but one young Frenchman there was whose attentions were a little more marked than those of the other young men.

There came a day when his mother proposed to come to tea with mine, and though we did not suspect it, there was an inner significance in this request. Unfortunately the day arranged had been crowded with engagements for each of which we had been a little late — as is too often the way in Paris. Homeward bound across the Champs de Mars, what should we see but a merry-go-round of the most alluring kind; grey horses and bay horses with rouged nostrils, flashing glass eyes and prancing forelegs invited equestrians at twenty centimes a ride. It was too much for me. I am ashamed to say we stopped the cab we were in and each bestrode a horse.

We began to revolve. The steeds were realistic, they were super-horses for they reared lethargically in their circular course. It made one feel just a little sea-sick till they really got going, when all other sensation was lost in an overwhelming giddy-

ness. For four sous one really got more than one wanted.

The ride ended, we resumed our *fiacre*, and got home to find that Madame — (who had been strictly on time) had left her cards and departed. She did not return. We afterwards heard from a reliable source that she had come to discuss the possibilities of an alliance between her son and me. He was a young man of sporting proclivities, fond of polo and hunting. His mother little realized that it was my love of horses that had lost me if not a husband, at least a very flattering proposition.

■

Les contes les plus aimables ne sont-ils pas les plus courts? Il faut être léger pour voler à travers les âges. Le vrai génie français est prompt et concis. Il était incomparable, dans la nouvelle — je voudrais qu'on fît encore la belle nouvelle française, je voudrais qu'on fût élégant et facile, rapide aussi. C'est là, n'est-il pas vrai? la parfaite politesse d'un écrivain.

ANATOLE FRANCE.

■



X

THE French excel in the art of writing stories. In the thirteenth century they told their incomparably simple tales in verse. Marie de France was amongst these earliest *conteurs*. Surely no more romantic name could adorn an authoress!

In the fifteenth century the form is changed, the writers adopt prose, and a hundred years later they already become proficient in their most difficult art. In the sixteenth century the story-tellers increase in number. The poetess Marguerite, Queen of Navarre (sister of François I), tries her hand at it, Rabelais, Montaigne, and a host of others. In the seventeenth century Scarron is writing tales, Scarron, whose lamentable deformity did not prevent him from marrying the cultured and amiable young woman, Françoise d'Aubigné, who, after his death in 1660, became Marquise de Maintenon.

The eighteenth century is rich in *conteurs*. Voltaire, Antoine Hamilton, Diderot, the Chevalier de


Boufflers, whose intimate acquaintance we English people owe to Mrs. Webster, are in this company, and in the nineteenth century Stendhal, Charles Nodier, Balzac, Mérimée and Flaubert, are showing us how the thing should be done; but the Revolution guillotined all gaiety in these later writers, for after it, and for nearly a century, *la littérature ne rit plus*. Daudet and France are the giants of our own time, and Guy de Maupassant who is certainly unsmiling. He is content to create, to breathe life into the dust, and to leave us to do the rest. To cry or to laugh at his creatures as we think fit, to despair or to hope with them as we will; but he possesses the three essential qualities of the great French writer: "*D'abord la clarté, et puis encore la clarté, et enfin la clarté.*"

Because the French can write stories as no other people can, so they can also tell them, delicately, naïvely, with an economy of words and an extravagance of humor. The simplest among them are *conteurs*, they are a nation of Sheherazades, and when Hélène, my maid, told me a tale whilst I was dressing, it was impossible not to be late for dinner. She told me this one, that has haunted me ever since,

but I have had to transpose it into my own key, in which it does not sound so well.

Germaine was a *payse* of Hélène. They both came from the Berri. She worked for a well-known hat-shop in the rue de la Paix. She was too soft and gentle to live alone in a rough world, so she became the friend of Jean de B. She was modest in her tastes and her demands, and more than content to find herself established by him in a small apartment in the rue Laurestan, near the Avenue Kléber. Her corn-colored hair was the only bright thing in her two dark rooms on the fourth floor.

All day long she worked deftly at the crowns and brims of hats. Sometimes she would be called from her seat in the work-room to try on the particular model for which she was responsible. The client who was fitting would notice how pretty she was with her short sleeves and her long arms. Her skilled fingers would pin and pinch the straw or felt, stretch it on her knee, or shear it with her giant scissors. She was grave and absorbed in her task, and only smiled — into the mirror — when she had finished. Then she carried the hat back into the

 *atelier* to join her companions, who were sitting in a row like those little tropical birds on a perch (I think they are called wax-bills): one buys them on the *Quais*.

Six months after Jean established her in the apartment, his father died. When he told Germaine of his bereavement she cried, a great deal for Jean, and a little for herself, for death always means change and she was happy.

The next day she went to a shop in the Avenue des Ternes and bought a bead wreath for the grave. She showed it to the girls in the work-room during the luncheon hour, and gave it to Jean that evening. The lilies had curling yellow stamens, pansies and leaves surrounded them. The wreath had been expensive, she had chosen the first quality, and it had swallowed up all her economies for the month. When Jean saw the wreath he feigned admiration. She pointed out the brightness of the beads, and the delicacy of their coloring. She caressed the petals, and the gestures of her tender hands seemed to clothe them with the fragility of life.

At Christmas time these two decided to go down together to the small château Jean had inherited

from his father. It takes four hours to reach Bourges from Paris, and Le Chantal is only a few kilometres farther.

Alphonsine, the wife of the lodge-keeper, was waiting for them. She had made fires everywhere, the house was full of the good smell of burning logs and alive with their crackling. Germaine followed Jean and Alphonsine as they went from room to room, and murmured, "How beautiful!" She held a little bag of tartan cloth in her hands. She had bought it at the *Trois Quartiers* for her journey. The French are fond of tartan, they call it *Ecossais*. In the boudoir she said, "*Que c'est beau!*" for the third time. A family portrait by Rigaud hung over the mantel-piece. Jean turned his head to see whether this picture had attracted her attention, but she was standing like a child, looking at nothing, waiting for the next move.

They went upstairs. When Alphonsine opened the door of his mother's bedroom, Jean told her to leave them. A blue and white dust-sheet covered the walnut bed. The olive-green velvet *prie-Dieu* stood by the window. Above the bed a branch of *buis béni* had been stuck behind the crucifix. It

was faded and yellow, like the photographs of his father that stood upon the round table in the centre of the room.

"*Comme c'est beau*," said Germaine again, and this time he embraced her.

The whole room bore the imprint of her who had given him birth, whose stiffening knees had spent long hours on this *prie-Dieu*, whose body had grown cold for ever on that bed.

They visited the garden. The rose trees slumbered under their protecting straw. The lead Cupid was shrouded against the frost, only the tip of his arrow pierced the sacking. Not a leaf was on the *charmille*, but under it one was at shelter from the wind.

The days followed each other crisp and short, too short for Jean who was busy all the time. Germaine worked at her filet lace (like every Berri-chonne, she was proficient in embroidery), or played with the tortoise-shell cat. The love of the land that lies dormant in every French soul woke in her, she felt it quicken like a mystic heart-beat, so at her wish they decided to prolong their visit for a few days, and again for a few days more. Then Ger-

maine decided she must go back to Paris, just for a little while. She went. Jean drove her to the station in the covered farm-cart. The old grey horse jogged along indifferently under slack reins. It had been a dry frosty time. The roads were white, cut with sharp ruts, tattooed here and there with the herring-bone of a motor tire. Catkins were dangling from the hazels. The station buildings, seen a mile off, were like toys you take out of a box.

Germaine had reclothed herself in her discarded Paris *chic*. Her feet dangled from the wooden seat. A ribbon bow tied her beige shoes on the instep. After she had climbed into the train she pushed both hands through the window to wave good-bye; the tartan bag flapped on her wrist.

After two days Jean received a postcard from Germaine. She had arrived safely, but she had a sore throat which obliged her to stay indoors. Le Chantal felt empty without her. He missed her; especially when he caught sight of the filet lace, or the fichu she wound round her head. The next day there was no letter. The laborers were working in the wood cutting *la saulée*, as they do every thirty years. Jean stayed some time watching them.

It is pleasant to see the clean-cut stakes pile up, to see them bundled and tied with the unerring exactitude of the man whose eye is his measure. A faint smell of acrid bark filled the air. The charcoal burners were building fires of chips where the ground had been cleared. When Jean got back to the house, he found a telegram to say that Germaine had scarlet fever, she had been moved into hospital; it was signed by the resident doctor. He read the telegram to Alphonsine who was no scholar. She said "*Miséricorde,*" but she told Jean her own children had had scarlatina and had been all the better for it. Then she returned to the kitchen, for she was making *pommes soufflées* for his luncheon.

Three days later Jean told her to pack his bag for Paris. As the Citröen drove him to the station he recalled the drive there with Germaine. The frost had broken, heavy rains had fallen, the road was grey where it had been white, the ruts had been flattened into a paste of mud. When he got to Paris he felt momentary relief from anxiety before he reached the fever hospital at Aubervilliers to enquire. He was told that the patient's fever was high, but that the illness was taking its normal course.

The following days there was no improvement. Whilst Jean stood in the vestibule with the chief *infirmière*, who told him there was no cause for alarm, he knew that Germaine was dying. He hoped the end would not be long delayed. She died at eleven o'clock that very night.

There was no one that Jean could inform of her death, she had never spoken to him of her relations, but he sent a note to the *Première* of the work-room, who replied in a letter of perfectly turned phrases of condolence. All the girls, she said, had wept — (the little wax-bills). The funeral was at the Cimetière Montparnasse. It was at mid-day, so they were able to attend it.

Remembering the wreath Germaine had bought for his father's grave, Jean had hers covered with pansies and lilies. Their fragrance was overpowering. Germaine would have preferred bead flowers, they are more enduring. The real ones are ephemeral — a mere *déjeuner de soleil*.

It was a long time before Jean returned to Le Chantal. When he did so Alphonsine asked him what was to be done with Germaine's clothes. They

were hung in a big wardrobe on the landing, not many of them, just two dresses and a coat. Jean replied they were to be left there.

Summer came — the heat in July was intense. Jean, passing through Paris on his way to La Baule, glanced up at the windows of the shop in the rue de la Paix where Germaine had worked. An idea struck him. He wrote to the *Première* suggesting that she and two or three of her friends should spend a week of their fortnight's holiday at Le Chantal. The *Première* accepted with pleasure. In her answer she wrote: "*J'adore la campagne, ça repose les cheveux.*" Alphonsine was warned to make the necessary arrangements. Hélène (my maid) was amongst those the *Première* invited on this trip.

For two days the house and garden rang with their laughter. Whilst the fine weather lasted they continued to laugh. The sun shone, the stubble fields were gold. On them wild flowers had flung the *tricolor* of France, scarlet poppies, blue borage, and white campion. The girls laughed and sat under the trees in the shade with bare heads. They sat on the banks of the Cher and dabbled their feet in its waters, and whilst they sat they sang the route-

marching song of the officers in "*Ciboulette*" — all Paris was singing it that year.

*"Y a de la lune au bord du toit qu'est ronde,
Qu'est ronde,
Y a de la femme chez-lui, chez toi qu'est blonde,
Qu'est blonde;
Y a du blé dans les moissons qui lève
Et y a d'la flamme au cœur des garçons.
Y a d' l'amour dans le soir si doux qui flotte,
Qui flotte,
Du jupon un peu partout qui trotte
Qui trotte;
Y a d' l'oiseau dans les maisons,
Y a d' la fille sur les gazons
Et des amants dans les buissons."*

Then it began to rain; the *Première* and Louise did not mind, but the other two shivered and moped, and wandered about the house disconsolately. One day, out of sheer *ennui*, they opened the cupboard and tried on Germaine's clothes, and when they left they had her dresses packed up in their valises. They

☉
were fond of Germaine, but the French are essentially practical.

Jean was angry when he got home six weeks later and heard of it through Alphonsine. She did not tell him that she herself had already worn out all Germaine's stockings. It was foolish of him to be cross, for after all clothes, like flowers and life and love, are a *déjeuner de soleil*.

*At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep
 of the well closed doors,
Let me be wafted.*

*Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks — with
 a whisper
Set ope the doors, O soul.*

*Tenderly — be not impatient,
(Strong is your hold, O mortal flesh,
Strong is your hold, O Love.)*

WALT WHITMAN.



XI

DOCTEUR M. was a Scotsman by birth. His father had come to Paris in the early 'seventies to work in a well-known firm of chartered accountants, and had married the daughter of one of the French partners. The doctor had lived all his life in France with the exception of those years when he had studied in Edinburgh to obtain his degree. He was bi-lingual. The graft of the Latin on the Scots temperament had produced in him a subtlety of perception, a quality of imagination, and an intellectual curiosity such as one seldom meets where there is no blended nationality.

His father's death had left him with a comfortable income. As his mind and his habits were leisurely he would not allow his practice to interfere with what interested him more deeply — the study of human nature. He spoke of the human soul as a surgeon speaks of the body, neither could hold

any surprises for him, he had dissected too many of the one and of the other.

The sharpness of his clipped sentences and shrewd eyes were contradicted by a veiled mysticism in his outlook, which he was at pains to conceal, but which is of course purely Celtic. He told me the following story when I was recovering from the usual attack of March influenza. He came to see me in my hotel bedroom, whilst the spring evening was fading into night, that hour which the French describe as *entre chien et loup*.

We did not trouble to put on the light as the twilight grew; through the closed windows the roar of the Paris traffic reached us dulled by distance. A volume of Chateaubriand was lying on my bed, and whilst he talked he kept turning over the pages as if he were looking for something. I can scarcely remember whether he spoke in French or English, perhaps a little of each, but whichever language he used, he used it to the best advantage, and though it is some years since he told me the story, it seems like yesterday. If it had not been for the book I was reading I might never have heard it.

“Baroness Edmond de K. had married at eighteen.

She had been brought up at the Convent of Notre Dame de Sion. When she had finished her education her Scottish father and mother had taken her to travel in Italy. She met her future husband at Florence, so the journey ended there, and they never got farther than Fiesole. After a week's acquaintance she told her parents that she wished to marry Monsieur de K. He was extremely devout, and she had seen nothing outside the convent wall and her own home on the West Coast of Scotland.

"In May Italy is intoxicating. I can imagine how it must have been with her. The sunshine touching her red hair with flame, and flushing her pale cheeks. I can imagine, too, the couple passing out of the sun-baked turbulent streets into the churches. To enter them in high summer is like drinking a draught of ice-water, it is like passing from fever into sleep.

"Their wedding was in Scotland in '93. After it, the K.'s went straight to his château in Brittany, and remained there till the eldest son was born. Their year was divided between Brittany and Paris, with a slight bias in favor of the latter.

"The birth of the second son was in Paris. The

first confinement had been difficult and the child was delicate. These two accouchements and the death of her husband were the events of Edith de K.'s life. He died when Louis, her eldest boy, was sixteen. His malady was long and painful. It was only in the last few days that Madame de K. called in a hospital nurse. For two years she had annihilated herself in the service of his tortured body. Throughout his illness he had long periods of savage ill-humor which, under the direction of her confessor, she offered up, and intervals of Christian resignation and of stoic endurance for which she thanked God; he never expressed gratitude to his wife or affection for his children, who were rarely admitted into the sick-room. But none the less did she cling tenaciously to the life for which she and Death were haggling.

"After her husband's death the Baroness de K. put on widow's weeds. She can never have followed the fashions very closely, I expect that it was at once too difficult in Brittany and too expensive in Paris. Very possibly it was the recollection of old engravings of Mary Stuart that prompted her to adopt the unconventional pointed coif of crêpe that she

wore always. By this, and by her long full skirts, Madame de K. certainly aged herself by fifteen years. At thirty-five she looked like fifty, and Nature had joined in this conspiracy by whitening her hair prematurely and by lining her face with wrinkles as delicate as the skeleton of a leaf.

“For the first year of her widowhood she lived at R. in an unbroken solitude. After her husband’s death it was suggested that she should take the boys to Scotland to recoup her own health from the severe strain of his illness, but her parents were dead, and by that time her father’s place had been sold to the American who has it now. So she remained at the château, watching over the children and the estate.

“I don’t know when it was exactly that it was discovered that Louis was not as advanced as other children are. At first his backwardness was put down to the after-effects of a severe pneumonia, the winter climate of Brittany must have been very unsuitable to such a frail physique. His studies were difficult, he was tractable, but inattentive in work and in play. Bertrand had the same fragile appearance, but he was vital and precocious — so

their family doctor told me. He also said that Madame de K. never alluded to the difference between the two boys, and she did not, as some mothers would have done, single out the one child in preference to the other. Beyond providing for their bodily well-being, and their religious instruction, she took little heed of either. But the claims of their education were becoming urgent. It was impossible to continue in the country. Bertrand, the younger boy, had to attend a *lycée*, so the old house in the rue Vanneau was re-opened, and the shutters that had grown rusty with disuse thrown back, the gravel in the court-yard was finely raked, the holland covering which shrouded the chandelier was removed, but this was merely for the greater convenience of the house-flies, who enjoyed perching on its crystal drops, and filling the room in summer time with their drowsy buzzing. Nobody else used the long white and gold *salon*, least of all Madame de K., who had contracted the French habit of living in her bedroom. The rare visitors at the house were received in her husband's study, which was the room in which I originally saw her.

"The first thing the Baroness did on her return

to Paris was to order a picture of her late husband to be painted. She had met Auguste C., the artist, the year of her marriage. He was painting in Florence at that time. A desultory friendship resulted, and had been kept up more or less ever since. It was a happy coincidence for her that he remembered the blurred features of Edmond de K. — his hesitating speech and gestures, the soul, half *roué*, half bigot, that lay behind his shallow eyes.

“With the assistance of some old photographs and many kodaks she had taken, the artist reconstructed his subject. The result had given satisfaction. The picture is one of the best C. ever painted. (He was a pupil of Carolus Duran.) He painted Edmond at his writing-table — not that he often wrote — with a book in his hand — not that he ever read. The portrait was hung in the dining-room, and then it was a question of C. painting the two boys to hang pendant to it. But this was not so easy. The sitters caused the artist to despair. Louis was not allowed to stand for more than a few minutes at a stretch, for it had been ascertained through a consultation with a specialist that his tardy development was due to a congenital weak-

ness of the heart. '*Véritable fils de son père,*' the family doctor had said when he was alone with the great physician.

"Auguste C. came back from his morning's work in a state of profound discouragement. Bertrand had been restive and disobedient, Louis inanimate — unpaintable. Their mother offered no assistance, she had said that she did not wish to see the picture till it was finished. And so it was that Auguste thought of introducing his daughter Ginette into the house to help with the sittings. He made a trivial excuse for her arrival the first time — she had come to bring him some forgotten tubes of paint, but after that the girl's presence became an understood thing and from that moment his difficulties decreased — for she knew how to amuse them and keep them quiet.

"On the day the picture was shown to Madame de K. the painter arranged for Ginette to be present. He explained the part she had played in its achievement. The sittings were at an end, C. was packing up his easel and his palette. The young people were bidding each other good-bye. '*On se reverra,*' Ginette had said, but the boys had no such confidence.

The calendar of their young lives had not marked many fêtes so far. Pressed by her sons to do so, Madame de K. felt herself obliged to express a similar hope.

"In the two years that followed, Ginette came into that house as the sun enters a prison cell, welcome but unbidden.

"Louis' nineteenth birthday was in the spring of 1914. Bertrand was in the Philosopher's Class at his *lycée*, later he was going to read for the Bar. Poor Louis' studies had reached the stage at which further progress seemed unlikely. This was the year that Ginette C. took me to see the Baroness. .

"She was an arresting personality. I remember her eyes, from which emotion seemed to have been seared by sorrow. They were bracken-colored eyes, with small pupils. She asked me about Scotland. 'The bell heather must be in flower now,' she said, 'it used to grow so well around my old home. We have not got any in Brittany.' I saw Louis for a moment that day. He was tall and slight, and not bad-looking. Some inhibition from his childhood upwards had prompted him to be silent in the company of strangers. When he got to know you bet-

ter he asked a lot of questions, as a child does, persistently, without waiting for the answer; and yet strangely enough in the tangled skein of his conversation an apposite word, a relevant phrase, would offer suddenly a thread that one could wind, and then his mother, who had not appeared to be listening, would look up and smile. It was the only time she ever did so.


"I dined several evenings with Ginette C. that early summer. Bertrand de K. would come to the studio to play duets with her. She played well, but her music was that of a mere dilettante compared to her brother Xavier's. His young feet were already treading with sure steps the uncharted paths of genius.

"Then came the war, and during my hospital work I lost touch with Ginette. The first year I heard nothing from her. Then she wrote to say she was working with a Croix Rouge Ambulance at D.; so was the Baroness. She mentioned the two K. boys. In a few months Bertrand would be of military age. Louis — exempt from service — was safe in Brittany — her own brother Xavier was fighting in the Argonne.



"It was in 1918 that I heard of Xavier's death. He was just twenty-two when he was killed. I felt quite sure Ginette would answer the letter I wrote to her, but she did not. She may never have received it. I did not go to Paris till after the Armistice. Then I called at the rue Vanneau and heard through the servants that Mademoiselle C. was staying with the Baroness. '*Ces Dames*,' I was told, were both out, so I left my card. Next day I received a telephone call asking me to come in the afternoon. I saw them both. Ginette and I walked up and down the garden for a long time. The wind was fetching the last leaves off the big sycamore tree. I watched the spiral they described as they fell. Through that abnormal power of observation with which the brain is possessed in moments of emotion I noticed the sepia stains on the leaves — seven or eight on each — and the blood red of their stalks. They fell one by one, some to lie on the gravel path, stirred restlessly by an icy breath, others to lie quite still on the heavily dewed grass.

"Ginette told me she was busy with Xavier's things — she was collecting his poems, Bertrand, invalided home some weeks earlier, was helping her.

 She hoped to publish them after the New Year. She was also making fair copies of his musical scores, and assembling his drawings. The cartoons of the frescoes he had designed for a convent chapel at F. had been given to her.

"She was gentle and piteous, not at all remote, as I had expected. That day I felt I understood everything that was passing through Ginette's soul, but I could not have done so, for six months later I heard that she was going to be married to Louis de K.

"I visited them all soon after. The young couple were living on the ground floor of the house. We had tea in Ginette's boudoir. Bertrand was there, too. For the first time in that dead house I felt the glow of life. It was like a bright sunset after a day of storm. We made plans to meet again when I returned from Switzerland, I was going there for a holiday. I had not had one for four years.

"I don't know how the Baroness discovered when I was next in France. I had not had time to communicate with anyone. She sent me an urgent message asking me to come round to her house.

"I was shown upstairs at once, and found her in the sitting-room she now occupied, and into which

she had transplanted all the furniture of the Baron's study, the shapeless armchairs covered with slate-grey leather, and the two C. portraits out of the dining-room.

"She asked me at once if I knew what had happened. Then she told me, quite simply, without any sign of agitation. Ginette had left Louis. She had given no explanations, and for the first few days neither Louis nor his mother had attempted to follow or recall her. Then the Baroness had gone to see her.

" 'She is never coming back,' said Madame de K. firmly. 'Why should she? She loves Bertrand, she told me so; she has always loved him, will love him always. She married Louis only to be nearer Bertrand.'

" 'It's a strange thing, Doctor,' she continued, 'but I must have been deaf in the past. Deaf to the voice of reason. So many of us are. But that is no excuse. You see, I was anxious that there should be somebody here for Louis when I am gone. And now I feel like the man in the Gospel whose ears were opened. Sorrow and compassion may both cry "*Ephphatha*" to the human soul.'

“I lingered a little longer with her. An open book was lying on her lap. She was reading the *Mémoires d'Outretombe*. She pointed to the passage she had reached — it ran thus: ‘*Cette impossibilité de durée et de longueur dans les liaisons humaines, cet oubli profond qui nous suit, cet invincible silence qui s’empare de notre tombe et s’étend de là sur notre maison, me ramènent sans cesse à la nécessité de l’isolement.*’

“‘Are you obliged to go?’ she asked.”

■

*If there were dreams to sell
What would you buy?
Some cost a passing bell,
Some a light sigh,
That shakes from Life's fresh crown
Only a rose-leaf down.
If there were dreams to sell
Merry and sad to tell
And the crier rang the bell
What would you buy?*

THOMAS LOWELL BEDDOES.

■



XII

I HAVE been here since the end of April. I am very fond of Paris. It is the city of all seasons — of all ages — of all tastes — of all habits of life. I should say I was very fond of France, but that nothing is more different from Paris than the rest of France . . . and whatever the peculiarities of either the one or the other, after every residence among them I am always obliged to come to the mortifying result that these people make on the whole a *better thing* of human life than we do.”

Thus wrote Miss Berry to Mr. Macaulay on the 23rd of June 1834; she concludes her letter in a less eulogistic vein: “I have been confirmed in my opinion of the deterioration of the taste of France, not only in literature, but in everything amenable to the laws of taste, they have lost all that grace in their patterns, colors, and finish for which they used to be so remarkable.”

At the period at which she writes a murrain of

bad taste was blighting England and France. Louis Philippe's reign was no more fortunate than the Victorian age, but France recovered more quickly than we did for the French have above all other nations the sense of taste, and can never lose it. It is both instinctive with them and cultivated, but the finest taste must be instinctive. From the aesthete to the working man, this is what they possess.

They demand an interpretation of beauty as insistently as they demand beauty itself. The raw material pleases but does not satisfy. *Facture* means a great deal and goes a long way. Sidney Smith said that only a Bishop gains by translation, and I confess that I am at a loss how to translate this particular word.

The appreciation for skilful treatment of their subject may at times lead them astray, but taste is always ready to prune back what is merely meretricious. They will forgive much for an interpretation that is individual and entertaining, *amusant* is how they would describe it. I remember the word being used by Mr. Sargent in a felicitous manner, but since then it has become down at heel from the hard work young Bloomsbury has got out of it.

In my studio days we were told never to work *de chic*, which meant out of your head without looking at the model; that is what the French will not tolerate, in other words there must be sound and truthful drawing behind the treatment of the subject whether in art or literature. They have too strong a feeling for proportion, line, balance, to disregard these essentials.

A Frenchman complained to me a short time ago that elegance is a thing of the past. Perhaps that is true as we understand it. Elegance is certainly indigenous to France. "*Partout*," he continued gloomily, "*ça a l'air d'une sortie de Métro*" (there was an east wind blowing which may have affected his digestion). I listened sympathetically, realizing that the elegance of the French has been hybridized by the pollen of other nations. Their elegance was a flower that did not grow in an English garden — Nature's landscape was not its setting. It is not the fault of the French that under cosmic influences the seed, blown out of their neat *parterres* by the winds of the world, does not always come true. The older generation in France suffers from the undress of the day, but it must

console itself with the fact that what is inelegant is often what is comfortable. The love of *tenue* is frequently outraged, but there it is; we must all shuffle along to the syncopated rhythms of the twentieth century. The French can dance the jazz as well as they could dance the gavotte, and better than we do, for novelty has irresistible charm for them. In shops for instance, "*c'est nouveau*" is a higher tribute than "*c'est joli*," and the greater includes the less.

Shops — how they have changed! Here too the *Zeitgeist* (a cubic spook no doubt) is busy destroying the past. In my young days the calm of Worth's shop was august. It was "life's crown," but now Tattersall's ring would be drowned by the roar of the fashionable dressmaking establishments. There is a steady undertow of noise, and now and then an ejaculation detaches itself from the babel, a cry at the same time plaintive and imperious. Whilst waiting for somebody or something in one of these great *maisons* on one occasion I heard a quarrel in progress, a smothered and fierce altercation was raging between the vestal virgins. Then suddenly these words burst forth, like flames out of smoke, "*Mademoiselle, vous*

êtes d'une insolence sans nom." Alas, many occasions in life deserve this comment; indeed I am not sure that I should not be placed in the same category as this unfortunate young woman for daring to publish my slender volume.

No vulgar disputing such as this could have destroyed the hush and mystery of Worth's precincts in the old times. Monsieur Jean was seldom seen, but his near presence made itself felt. In the outer court of his temple, cultured voices spoke softly, great names were called as great ladies came and went, light footsteps led clients respectfully to fitting-rooms, whilst fitters approached, punctual as the seasons, bearing the shrouded embryo of a dress. Finally Jean Worth himself appeared, his majesty tempered with indulgence in the case of the *débutante*, for in the chrysalis he already saw the butterfly. Mannequins were few in these far away days, but a still life was cunningly composed in the showroom — satins and brocades flung on a centre table, damasks especially woven for the Maison Worth on Lyons looms, grouped by an artist's hand in such a way as the brush of Largillière would have chosen to paint them. Textures threaded with gold that

vied with the glory of Solomon or with the lilies of the field.

Most of the fitters were elderly. They were specialists, no general practitioners were tolerated under this roof. It would have been vain to suggest an amendment to them, only the Master could do this. Where a dress demanded a bow I remember a little old lady being called in to tie it. She had made bows on Worth's dresses for a quarter of a century. Her fingers were as delicate as the petals of a flower but strong as steel pincers.

Just opposite Worth's was the hat shop of Mademoiselle Léontine, highly in vogue at the time of which I am writing. She could not claim the Apostolic succession as could Jean Worth, but she was an artist, and her narrow window displayed the multi-colored objects of her fancy and ingenuity. A hat on the head is worth two in the hand, and I doubt if those she made were as becoming as the sober sealed pattern of to-day. Mademoiselle Léontine has moved with the times, she has also moved out of her rabbit-hutch in the rue de la Paix, and is to be found elsewhere. Her henna head has assumed the Eton crop, not unbecomingly, for the Frenchwoman will

always prove herself equal to the exigencies of Fashion. Her bosom is a little more ample, but I fear her banking account is not commensurate. Rival houses have sprung up, and loyalty is not the strong point of the well-dressed woman. Sometimes I visit Mademoiselle Léontine just to talk of the past, and she becomes emotional at once, tears start readily to her eyes, but not to the extent of making a more accommodating price should I call upon her to do so.

My first childish experience of the Paris *modiste* was at the end of the rue Pauquet days. The daughter of Madame de Pourtalès, the celebrated beauty of the Second Empire, gave my mother the address of Mademoiselle Suzanne. I was not held worthy of the greater shops. Mademoiselle Suzanne lived up four flights of uncleaned stairs in the rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. She was an extremely pretty peroxide blonde, with eyes as dark as sloes. After due consultation she suggested a "picture" hat. It was fashioned out of Tuscan straw and trimmed with I don't know how many black ostrich plumes. They nodded in every direction on its wide brim. My mother sighed at the price (I think it was one hundred and fifty francs), but Mademoiselle Su-

zanne assured her that it was given away. The feathers, she insisted, would be heir-looms which through a long and, she hoped, turbulent future, would stand me in good stead.

Mademoiselle Suzanne might have echoed the sentiments of d'Argenson when congratulated on the charms of his niece, Mademoiselle de Bérelle, "*Nous espérons*," he said smiling, "*qu'elle nous donnera bien du chagrin*." The hat was designed for my first Ascot, but as it rained without pause, a sou'wester would have been more useful, and soon after that fine feathers ceased to make fine birds, so the "picture" hat was an error in judgment. You are bound to make a great many of these in Paris.

The *vendeuse* of the French shops is of very different fibre to the English saleswoman. In England it is difficult to make her really interested, but the Frenchwoman's attentions are parasitic, she fastens on to you with the lust of a vampire. She is the daughter of the horseleach who cries "Give, give." Only those possessed of an astral body can hope for escape. To elude from the hands of the surgeon with an intact appendix is child's play in comparison, and all the while the young person is bland,

accommodating, specious. It is only when the subject of the price crops up, the first to interest, the last to be mentioned, that her manner changes, the reed becomes the oak. "*On les aura*," said the French of the Germans, and this should be the war-cry of the *vendeuses*, one and all.

The *robe d'intérieur* is what the young person first offers us. (She is invariably muffled in a shawl, though the temperature of the *salon* is that of the reptile house in the Zoo.) This is a dress for which the Englishwoman has no use, and in rejecting it, I have felt tempted to say, "We live differently in England, it is not thus that our stage is set."

Our English homes have none of the perfection of detail that you find in France, whether expressed in terms of wealth and luxury, or of simplicity and common sense, and no Englishwoman can be *chez elle* as the Frenchwoman is. Even as I dismiss the *robe d'intérieur*, the recollection of one particular room comes back to me. Sober colors for the most part, the real *couleurs d'ameublement*, which centuries have accepted as true and harmonious. Here and there a vibrant note in a picture, a porcelain, or a cushion. The light evenly distributed, the

warmth also. A wood fire burning contentedly behind its veil of metal gauze, the freshness of mimosa branches filling the air. Everything has been studied and reasoned, everywhere there is well-being, intimacy. This is the true setting for the *robe d'intérieur*.

Once in the fitting room after the great surrender there is peace. In the society of these absorbed intelligent women whose watchful eyes nothing escapes, there is a sense of security. At times one catches glimpses of that part of their being which is detached from their work. We strike the ore of their humanity, and strike it rich. One of them will pause, to refer to some dead friend perhaps, and we are swept off our feet by the happiness of their power of expression. In France the *mot juste* is not confined to the man of letters, or the wit; the humblest of the French can use it, and how many of them do! It is their daily bread, for which they need not petition. Some of the things they say so simply, are sound waves circling eternally in the memory, as permanent as if they were graven upon a rock.

Perhaps it is the love of their land that gives them this golden tongue, for we have seen something of

it here, in the country people who live by seed time and harvest, whose work is apportioned by the rays of the sun, but our woodland birds lose their song when they come to live in towns. The Frenchman's roots are deep down in the soil of France; environment can never change him, the earth of France is his cradle and his death-bed.

Though the Frenchman does not change, the fashions do. Mademoiselle Léontine sighs for the old times, and no wonder, for a bloodless revolution in clothes has taken place since her palmy days. Some force has been unchained which has at once destroyed and created. Its origin may be in the feminist movement, who shall say, but the decree has gone forth that woman is no longer to be adorned as she used to be. The designers of fashions have become cynical, the *amusant* dominates over the elegant, we may yet come to plus-four ball gowns, or, following the negro tendencies of the times, to skirts (skirts only) of raffia and beads. All this is more surprising because fashion formerly had its own grammar and its strict rules of syntax. Mademoiselle Chanel must rank with the subversive leaders of the century. She is the Lenin of the sartorial

world. She has had the effect on dressmaking that Malherbe had on prosody. Boileau — the old bore — wrote "*Enfin Malherbe vint.*" I have looked out Malherbe in Larousse before correcting my proofs, to be sure of the spelling, and the excellent lexicographer says he rendered "*l'œuvre d'art plus simple . . . plus difficile.*" As if it were not difficult enough already. The battle for simplicity and clarity has been waged through three centuries of French literature and now the war is being carried into the dressmaking *salons*.

Artificers of new fashions hesitating as to the shape of a sleeve or the position of the waist-line have woken to the fact that the shape of the dress is the shape of the human form. Necessity has created a generation of slender women with good legs and the features that are the complement to short hair. Though to be sure there is nothing new in this, it was much in vogue in France at the end of the eighteenth century and was ghoulishly termed *coiffure à la guillotine*.

The *grands magasins*, the equivalent of our Harrods and Selfridge, have always been fiercely democratic; they are also infinitely more crowded and



worse ventilated. The purchase of a ribbon under scrum conditions produces in a perfectly normal constitution symptoms of acute claustrophobia. If you do succeed in buying it, you are quite likely at the same time to purchase several bottles of perfumeless *Eau de Toilette*, a lampshade, and a waste-paper basket, none of which things you require, but they act as a sort of vaccine against a possible second attack of the dementia that you contracted here.

Time was when Boissier and Marquis were more regularly patronized by the visitor to Paris than they are now. The craze for becoming or remaining thin has relieved the traveller of the obligation of bringing back to England those heavy boxes of sweets and chocolates that complicated the packing for the return journey, but even so the secret of one's impending departure to Paris should be jealously guarded, for the moment it is announced acquaintances will instantly suggest that as, or if, one is an angel . . . the same day they send one the shoes that have to be returned. Unfortunately on our arrival in Paris it is not only as ministering angels that we repair to the shoe shop. Our need is as great if not greater than that of our friends. The

shoe shops are relatively quiet places, a well behaved, distinguished personnel is there eavesdropping, and a certain humiliation attaches to the admission that what these artists have confectioned is unwearable. The old *Punch* joke is resuscitated, "it's not the shoe that pinches" but an idiosyncrasy in the conformation of the foot, which the shoemaker assures us was not evident when this pair was ordered. Impossible to defend our case; it would require Sir Henry Curtis Bennett to prove that the foot — deplorable as it is — is unchanged. Useless to controvert the young man kneeling before us in a suppliant attitude. In the end it is better to admit that no blame attaches to the shoe or its maker, and to cry "*Mea culpa*," for there will be no change made in the shoe, and there can be none in the foot.

I remember a great dressmaker humorously elaborating on this theme of misfits which gave me a crystal-clear insight into the methods that obtain. She did an imaginary duologue between herself and a dissatisfied customer whose dress had come back for alterations: "Your sleeve too long? But that is the correct length this season; too tight? That is how they are being worn. *One* sleeve too long? The

model was identical, if you change it you lose the whole character of the dress."

There is, however, a wheedling attitude which equally spells disaster to the shopper. I heard it adopted in a hat shop. A customer was trying on hats. She had a face of concrete; the Germans might have usefully employed it for a gun emplacement if it had not suffered obvious damage in a pre-war engagement. A hat of gossamer texture was perched on this client's head. The effect was gravely reviewed. Then the *modiste* let herself go. "*Comme Madame est bébé,*" she breathed her rapture.

Enthusiasm for his wares is a legitimate enthusiasm of the vendor. There was an *antiquaire* who, on showing me round his shop, led me to a beautiful day-bed, which he sketched with a gesture. It was too fine for any commentary from him or from me. We stood before it silently, side by side, taking in its voluptuous curves, the patina of the frame, its woodwork soft and blunt to the touch, the bloom of the faded velvet. At last he spoke. "*Madame, c'est grand comme le monde.*" You felt the response that perfection evokes in this nation, artists first, shop-

keepers afterwards. The beauty they see in the world is reflected everywhere.

There is a term they employ which I first heard from the lips of Monsieur Buvelot, whose magnificent furniture and brocades are classics in the literature of upholstery. At his establishment you can trace French history through the designs and colors. An Empire silk had to be chosen, and he laid before us a quantity of samples, some so frayed and tattered that they were backed with canvas, all of them silvered by a century of sunlight. On buttercup-yellow, on leaf-green, or periwinkle-blue the Empire had traced its design, a wreath, a lyre, a star, perhaps a flower that Euclid might have drawn. "These are documents," said Monsieur Buvelot, turning them over with pious hands, and as he spoke Napoleon's bees hummed in his ears, the imperial eagles flapped their wings.

In different drawers of his big cupboards other periods of history lay imprisoned. The frail bouquets of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, picked from the gardens of the Trianon and flung with a tragic levity on gay backgrounds, seemed to hold the powder of the period within their folds. "Docu-

ments all," repeated Monsieur Buvelot. He assured us he was ready to repeat any of these brocades.

Who knows but that our own personalities are not reserved for reference too, so that the same patterns may be repeated throughout the ages? The hand that traced designs for Ur of the Chaldees is no more dead than the hand we clasp to-day, the document of life is an inscrutable palimpsest.

■

*La debolezza umana piange, sorride l'immortale
speranza.*

ON A TOMB AT PISA.

■



ENVOI

THE thought of France means to us to-day far more than it did in my youth, more than it has meant to the English people in the past. A French writer said that as we grow older so New Year's Day becomes "*le jour des morts*" to us — All Souls' Day. For countless thousands of the present generation France is consecrated ground where every day is All Souls' Day, and the graves are decked with the imperishable flowers of glory.

Speaking of an English boy-warrior who fell in the wood-fighting of the Marne, a woman of the people said to me, "*C'est un pays très calme, il dormira bien.*" Ten years have passed since the allied arms won back for France the calm of her land. A laughing land the French call it, and so it once more is.

France, deeply cherished by her sons, will continue always to smile for them, but she must smile

for us too, remembering those who stood beside her in her dark hour.

Foch wrote the following lines: "*Dans l'émotion d'un souvenir profond et toujours vivant, je me rappelle les rudes journées de 1914-18, et je salue les glorieux drapeaux Britanniques auréolés par la victoire.*" The letter is in a book (a war album) deposited in the British Museum as a permanent record of our comradeship in arms. On the opposite page is a sketch by Forain of a French soldier standing in a trench. On his face is the patient endurance of the defender, under the drawing these words — "*Toujours vers l'Est.*"

And now in peace time let us stand facing eastward, not watching for the hosts of the invading armies, but for the company of Heaven — waiting for the sun to rise.

November

1928.

